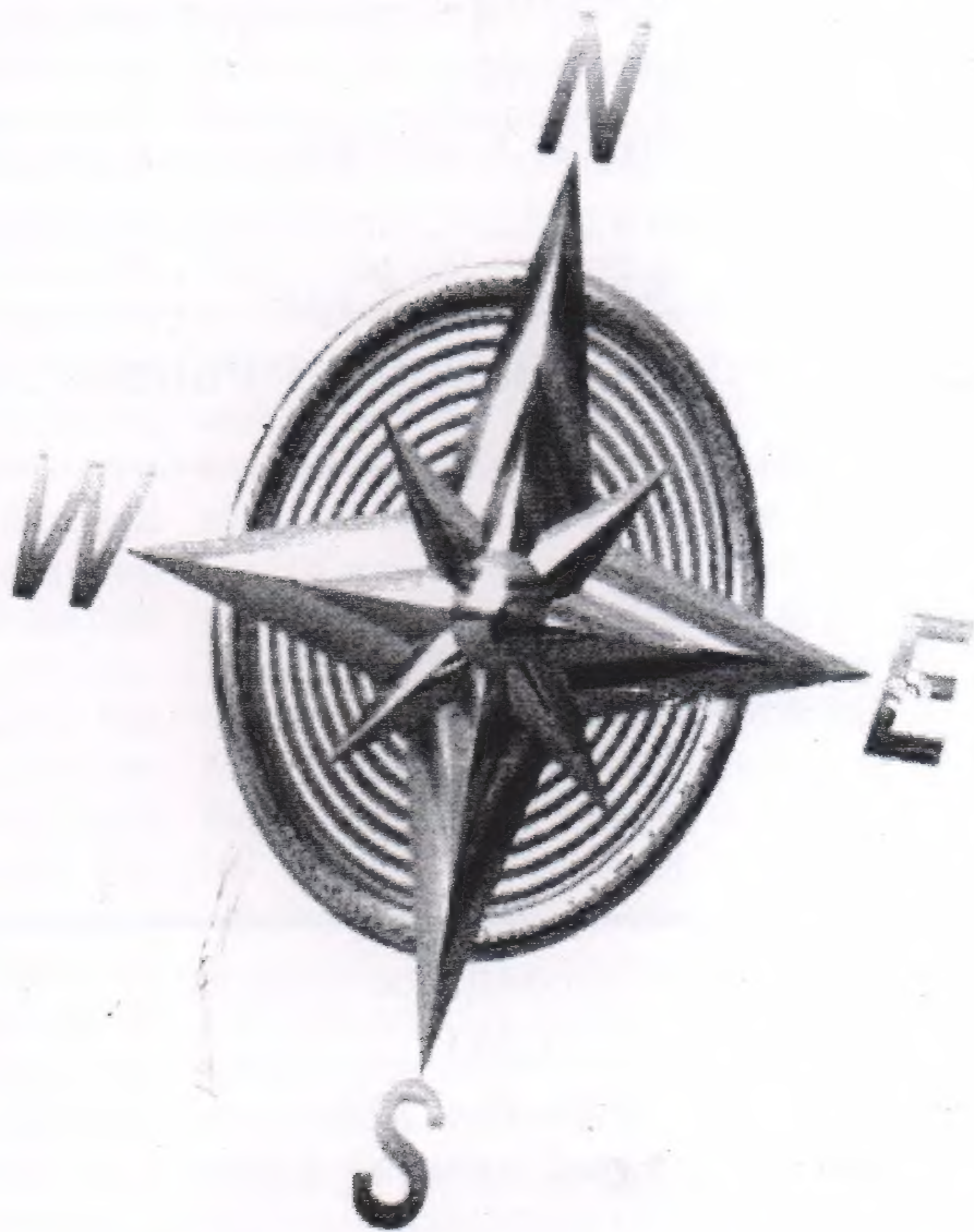


Revolutionary Perspectives 31

“South” *versus* “North”?



***Or Proletariat against
Bourgeoisie?***

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Africa, Showpiece... of Capitalist Decline

Anti-Globalisation at Cancun

***Also:* Strikes (Britain, Italy, Austria) • Parmalat • Top-up Fees
RESPECT Unity Coalition • Hutton and the BBC**

Revolutionary Perspectives

*Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation
British Affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party*

Series 3, No. 31, Spring 2004

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Editorial

The Struggle for the Middle East

It is now ten months since the US victory in Iraq, yet its attempts to impose *Pax Americana* on the Middle East have achieved only limited success. Although its position in Iraq has been consolidated, it remains in serious difficulties there. In Palestine, the "Road Map for Peace" sponsored by the US is going nowhere. With every passing day the Israeli regime makes the two state solution less and less possible and the US attempts to impose a solution are failing. Saudi Arabia, the key US ally, faces serious internal unrest which could threaten the regime. The one area where the US is able to take some comfort is from the voluntary disarmament of Libya and the agreement of Iran to suspend uranium enrichment. Although the deal with Iran was brokered by Britain, France and Germany, against the wishes of the US, it is likely that the invasion of Iraq precipitated both events. The clear demonstration that the US was prepared to invade a country against all principles of international law and against the wishes of the UN has made US enemies sit up and take notice. In fact, Bush and Blair have pointed to these events as a justification for the invasion of Iraq.

Within Iraq the US remains bogged down. While, on the one hand, it has reduced US casualties and succeeded in capturing Saddam Hussein, on the other, the insurrection continues unaffected by Saddam's capture and the numbers of Iraqis killed, either for working with the US, or in sectarian violence, has increased dramatically. The pattern of the current wave of attacks indicates that civil war is likely to follow an early US withdrawal. In an attempt to stem the attacks on US forces, the date for US transfer of power to an Iraqi government has been moved forward from 2007 to next June. However, in doing this the occupation authority (CPA) has made a political crisis for itself. This has arisen because the Shias are demanding direct elections to choose the new Iraqi authority which, as they are fully aware, will also be the authority which writes

the new constitution and makes long term agreements with the US. This is something of an embarrassment for the Bush junta since, although they have expressed undying love for democracy, and even claimed it was their fervent desire to bring democracy to the tyrannised Iraqis which drove them to invade the country; they intend to appoint a government of their own choosing. It is a measure of the crisis they face that they have gone scurrying back to the UN, previously derided as irrelevant by US imperialism, to try to enlist its help in scotching the political ambitions of the Shias. The US wants a pliant puppet government with the strings firmly in US hands, and with the US army in reserve in case things go wrong. The US invaded Iraq to get its hands on Iraq's oil and to secure a base from which to dominate the entire Middle East. Now they have conquered the country and have started to exploit its riches, withdrawal without achieving these objectives is out of the question. Any withdrawal in ambiguous circumstances would produce chaos which could drastically threaten US interests elsewhere in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia. It is for this reason that the US cannot risk having a democratic regime in Iraq. A Shia regime, for example, might try and remove the US military from the country and might try and reverse some of the legislation passed by Bremmer and Co. legalising the US plunder of the country. The Shias are, however, extremely suspicious of the US and unlikely to be fooled by the manoeuvres of the CPA even if the UN does provide a smokescreen. The prospect is therefore for the Shias rejecting whatever Iraqi Authority Bremmer cooks up and in the longer term entering the insurgency.

For the US capitalist class the benefits from the war have already started to arrive in the form of contracts handed out by the occupation authority. In the next round of handouts, which will be taking place in the next few months, the enormous sum of \$18.6bn is due to be shared out amongst the top US

multinationals. It is virtually certain that all these contracts will go to US companies since the only agency prepared to provide insurance for work in Iraq is one supported by the US treasury, and only US companies may use it. These contracts, therefore, represent a vast handout by the US state to the capitalist class with the risk involved also being shouldered by the state.

For US capitalism as a whole, these operations will be a massive drain on the economy if the Iraqis are not made to pay back both the capital invested and the profit which it should earn. It will take years for Iraq to repay these sums and such repayment can only be guaranteed by US control of the new government. This is, of course, a further reason why the US military must stay in Iraq: namely, to ensure the repayments keep flowing to the US. When US imperialism solemnly announces it intends to bring freedom to Iraq what it means is freedom for US capital to exploit the riches of the country and freedom for the dividends to return to the US. This is one of the fundamental reasons why US soldiers are dying in Iraq.

No contracts for the UK

The handing out of new contracts in Iraq has brought little benefit for the British capitalist class, who have been more or less excluded from a share of the \$18.6bn. In fact, the faction of the British bourgeoisie opposing the war has gained in strength in the last few months. This, and the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, has created political problems for the Blair regime. These are discussed in the article "Hutton and the BBC" in this edition. Blair has been forced to call further enquiries to try and deflect attention from the central charge against him, namely, that he has betrayed the interests of British imperialism.

Continued on page 3

Strikes in Britain

The Spectre of Class Struggle Still Haunts Europe

It is now twenty years since the start of the British miners strike. The two decades since have made it clear that this strike represented a watershed in the class struggle for the whole period since the Second World War. The defeat of the miners in 1985 opened up the road to a new period in which living and wage conditions of the working class have been savagely attacked through a whole range of measures. All of this was aimed at restructuring of capital and increasing the exploitation of workers with the aim of restoring profit rates on British capital. In general, it can be said that these attacks have succeeded and that the ruling class has had two decades in which to reorganize production, divide up the large concentrations of workers in the metropolitan countries and institute a new international division of labour.¹ In these decades, the poorest sections of the working class have seen their working conditions deteriorate, their pay decrease and any certainties about their future disappear. Privatisation has brought job losses, cuts in safety and worsening conditions at work. Flexible working has brought insecurity with many people finding themselves doing two or three jobs, in many cases for even less money. The industrial working class has decreased from approximately 40% of workers to 15% and millions of jobs have been exported to the peripheral countries. Benefits and pensions are disappearing as the entire post war settlement is being demolished and unemployment, despite official figure-tampering, has increased.

The last few years have, however, seen the re-emergence of defensive struggles throughout the metropolitan centres of capitalism which show that, despite the illusions of the bourgeoisie, the division of classes has not vanished and the class struggle is finding ways of breaking through the apparent social

peace. Although these struggles are, for the present isolated and defensive, they clearly have the potential to escalate in both scale and extent as the conflicts between labour and capital become ever more global. Although it is clear that the present strikes do not represent a turning point in the period since 1985, they show that the class struggle is alive and it is, of course, this struggle which forms the soil in which "the old mole of revolution" continues to burrow.

Struggles throughout Europe

In Italy attempts to restructure the economy have led to bitter strikes by the working class in the public sector and in transport. Transport workers, including bus, rail and airline staff have all struck against job cuts and pay freezes linked to the push towards privatisation. We report on one of these strikes in Milan in "First Sign of a Revival" in this issue. In Portugal, public sector workers have come out

from passive. Over the past three months there have been strikes by baggage handlers in Liverpool, a vote for action by Nissan workers where people complained they had not been consulted over relocation plans and had been treated like 'robots'. There have been transport strikes and the threat of strikes in Newcastle, Manchester, London, Loughborough and Littlehampton. In London, unrest amongst tube and rail workers continues. Both are prepared to strike against worsening conditions and insecurity. White-collar rail staff have recently said they will strike because of continuing management bullying, and tube workers were prepared to come out in support of sacked colleagues. Meanwhile Ken Livingstone, long-time leftist and darling of the Labour party, plans to end the disruption caused by dissatisfied workers by drawing up a 4 year tube deal aimed at ending annual strikes. Elsewhere, ballots for strikes have been held by further education teachers, refuse collectors and supermarket workers. At Land Rover's plants in Solihull and Gaydon, an overtime ban by workers resulted in almost a thousand people on the picket line. A deep running battle over pay has been brewing since last November when the company's deal of 6.5% was rejected and strikes are due to be held shortly.

Striking civil servants must take note: they can only win if they struggle outside the dead hand of union control.

on a one-day general strike against wage freezes. In France, public sector workers have started a series of strikes against job losses, cuts in pensions and worse conditions as a result of privatisation. Rail workers and gas and electricity workers have all come out on strike against plans to cut jobs and worsen employment policies. In Austria workers have struck over pension cuts, and strikes have occurred on the railways (see "Austrian Railway Strikes" in this edition).

In Britain, despite the media silence on most strikes, the working class is far

Potentially the biggest threat of unrest comes from workers in the civil service, where over 80,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services Union, from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to driving examiners have struck over low pay. Workers at the DWP refused a 2.6% pay offer which would have meant that starting salaries would have been £10,300 a year. According to the union wage levels are so low that one in four civil servants earns £13,750 whilst 41% earns £15,700. The union also accused the DWP of under-spending

more than £100 million in staff salaries and other running costs.

Not only was the pay offer rejected by a big majority last year, the ballot to take action this year was also won by a safe majority. The SWP, active in the PCS, urged workers to join the union. Some 2,000 did. Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS, wrote in *Socialist Worker*:

It is in all working people's interests to support others who are taking action to defend their terms and conditions. Any breakthrough that we make over pay can be a beacon to others...It's only by standing together that people have a chance to win...I am calling on non-members of the union to join the PCS on the day of the action.

Supporting the union, for the SWP, is synonymous with class struggle. Building the union, taking it over, defending it, winning the union leadership, all of this for the SWP constitutes class struggle. For Marxists, unions have never been organs of revolutionary struggle. Marx himself noted that unions fight only the effects of the existing system, they never try to change it. They exist to sell workers' labour power through negotiation, and as such have no wish to abolish the system which is based on wages and the central role of wage labour. As part of their brokering role, they inevitably sell off jobs and workers' rights in order to maintain the economic health of an industry or concern. And so it has been with the PCS. Despite the presence of Mark Serwotka in the union leadership and despite the presence of SWP members at a grass roots level drumming up support amongst the working class for the union, the PCS did what ever single union has ever done before it: it sabotaged the class struggle. The last time the strike was due to go ahead, a strike which would have been the biggest dispute in the civil service for more than a decade involving tens of thousands of workers, the union called it off as 'an act of good faith' to the same bosses who had kept workers living on pitiful wages for years. By calling off the general action they managed to divide and demoralise their members, since four other pay disputes (all neatly split up by the PCS) went ahead with strikes by 20,000 workers. No-one of course was given strike pay. A delighted Mark Serwotka told *The Guardian*:

We now have a basis on which we can talk constructively.

The SWP usually at this stage lambasts union leaders as stooges. This time it glossed over the whole thing as a 'mistake'.

But union's tactics are not mistaken. They are calculated to cause the least amount of disruption to capital whilst ensuring disputes are over as quickly as possible. Workers have only won their disputes when they have acted outside of union control. Last summer workers at British Airways walked out after bosses tried to impose a new swipe card system. The union had no initial control and so workers could not be as easily disciplined and won their dispute.

Striking civil servants must take note: they can only win if they struggle outside the dead hand of union control.

Workers can win if they act outside of and against their unions, by holding mass meetings of workers from different sectors where everything can be discussed out in the open and not behind closed doors in cosy meetings between management and union representatives. Electing revocable delegates onto strike committees with the aim of spreading the strikes and coordinating them for maximum impact will bring victory far quicker than months of token stoppages and endless conciliatory talks. Creating links with other workers, coordinating actions and supporting other sections of the class outside of union bureaucracy are the only things which will end union imposed isolation.

The miners, the strongest and most militant section of the working class remained loyal to their union in 1984-85. Their union rewarded them by keeping them isolated from other members of their class and it led to their defeat. Unions always have split workers up into little sections of this or that trade or job, but the attacks of capital are global and general, and so must be the response. Unions lead to isolation and defeat. If striking workers learn only one lesson from the past twenty years of struggle, it should be this one.

RT

Notes

1 For a further consideration of this see "Africa - Showcase of Capitalist Decline" in this edition.

Editorial

Continued from page 1

The class struggle

The Blair government is, however, continuing with its domestic work for the capitalist class in attacking wages and conditions and demolishing elements of the post war social democratic settlement. The latest part of this settlement to receive the attention of the government is education. This is discussed in the article "Labour Shows its Class" in this edition. The government is also considering massive redundancies in the civil service. A government commissioned report, by Gershon, recommends 80 000 jobs should go. This insecurity and a lousy pay offer had prompted strikes in the civil service for the first time in 13 years. Other sectors of the working class, such as teachers, transport workers and car workers have also struck. The strike at Land Rover was the first in 15 years. These strikes are discussed in the article "The Spectre of Class Struggle Still Haunts Europe", and other strikes in Austria and Italy are also reported in this issue. Though these strikes are defensive and do not represent a turning point in the dark period since the '80's, they show that the class struggle is not dead and buried as our rulers never tire of telling us. Capitalist society is divided into classes, and since capitalism is a system with insoluble economic contradictions, capital is forced to attack labour. This is the task the Blair team has embarked on with such determination. This inevitably leads to class struggle and, even if the actors are today not fully conscious of the implications of their actions, this is a political struggle. The present state of the world, which is illustrated in the article "Africa — a Showcase of Capitalist Decline" in this edition, shows the terrible effects of capitalism's crisis in the peripheral countries. It shows the need for the capitalist system to be replaced. Only the working class can carry out this task. The revival of the class struggle is a necessary part of the preparation for this.

Introduction

We are publishing here an article from the latest issue of *Battaglia Comunista*, the newspaper of our comrades in Italy. Whilst it is clear from what is written — and from the occasional mention of strikes in the mainstream press here — the ruling class in Italy is having to work hard to contain working class anger, the situation remains essentially the same from a revolutionary perspective: when and how are workers going to challenge the capitalist order that so blatantly continues to wreck their quality of life and conditions of work? Here, an apparently innocuous strike by tram workers in a single city is more noteworthy than some of the strikes which have gained international publicity. While all these strikes demonstrate the absurdity of claims that working class struggle is a thing of the past, the Milan tram workers, if only for a short time, have demonstrated what revolutionaries also know: that once workers really start to fight for themselves, without leaving their fate in the hand of the unions, a whole new scenario begins to open up.

Day in day out the full weight of capitalist propaganda is being thrown at workers, telling them in one form or another that there is no alternative to capitalism, that they'd better accept the way we live now, that to pursue any socialist ideal leads to gulags and death camps ... to leave the job of running the world to the jobsworth bureaucrats and politicians, no matter how corrupt they are. For sure, a single sector strike in one city is not going to suddenly overturn all these hammered-in messages. But it does, in practice, go beyond the boundaries capital tries to impose on workers' awareness of what could be done, and enhances their own organisational capabilities. For every revolutionary, for anyone who wants to see the end of capitalism and class-divided society, a report of workers collectively shaping their own struggle is heartening. It is a glimpse of how quickly a wider movement that would be able to challenge the existing order could develop. We have now moved into the realm of future possibilities but, as the article says, once workers show practically they are ready to act outside the limits imposed by capital it is up to revolutionaries to pose the next step on the way.

Surprise at the tram workers could open the way...

First Sign of a Revival

It was a massive bolt from the blue but the papers have had no more to say than the fact that the so-called wildcat strike of the Milan tram workers has been a very interesting 'first'.

For the first time a significant group of workers decided to go on strike against union policies and outside of their organisational set-up. It is also the first time that workers have broken the artificial barriers imposed on the class struggle by bosses and unions alike.

On December 1st the tram workers of Milan decided for themselves to go on strike from daybreak, thus striking at the heart of those 'protected hours' which reduce strikes to a lost cause for the workers and leave the firm unharmed. On December 13th, despite the city council calling in the police, there was a further total stoppage.

The Theses of our 6th Congress [on *Communist Work and the Trades Unions Today*, ed.] state:

There can therefore be no real defence of the interests of the workers, no matter how immediate, except outside of and against the union line and any type of

contractual mediation, which always end by losing rights and control.

[See *Internationalist Communist* 16, p17.]

Events amongst Italian tram workers in December are the first clear demonstration here of the validity of this thesis which was drawn up on the basis of our understanding of the role of the unions derived from concrete and dramatic historical experiences.

We've also written and spoken about how the anti-strike laws and regulations to which the unions subscribe with such zeal are not only valuable while the workforce and any workers' movement are under their control, but they are also useful as a 'weather vane' to test the mood of the workers when they extract themselves from the union grip and really decide to defend themselves. Last December's events also confirmed this perception.

The strikes were decided at depot assemblies, often without the presence of union officers — either from the Cobas [base committees] or from the confederation — and thus they began outside of the union frame. Thus we saw the workforce organising itself on

the ground and forming the kind of organs workers always create once they begin to act for themselves. The working class has been submitting to blows without defending itself for so long that it is a long time since these kind of bodies have been seen in Italy. Now that the tram workers, in the first instance, have chosen to force the issue of recuperating wages from the dire level they have been reduced to in every sector, they have been obliged to adopt this typical form of organisation. In their specific case this was the depot assembly.

Beyond this first, elementary level they did not go. Nothing strange about that, given that this was just an early episode in the break with several decades of stagnation and passivity. But this failure to organise beyond their own sector and link up with other workers is one reason for falling into the trap laid by both companies and unions.

The trap involved linking the agreement signed up in Milan between the ATM¹ and the unions to a national deal which didn't give the tram workers anything like what they'd had under the previous contract and provided for only a very partial recouping of losses once

the national contract was accepted. Without being able to counter this kind of blackmail — which was clearly instigated by the union — with the decisions of a national co-ordination of workers' assemblies, the tram workers were left in the hands of union initiatives, albeit radical or 'from the base'. In fact it was the latter who defined the line of action for the struggle in the coordination meetings. The first sign of decline came on January 30th when the general strike, called by the 'base' unions against the unions' overall national agreement, saw a reduced mobilisation. In Milan it was called off because it coincided with a strike proclaimed by taxi cab operators (which we don't hesitate to define as at the least ultracorporative).

In fact in Milan we know that the inevitable individualist slant of self-defence would have brought scant support for the strike. In any case, however, the union clearly said that the "advantages" of the Milan agreement were conditional on the acceptance of the national agreement. Nobody supposed that the city's tram workers could move on their own accord and come out solidly in struggle, as they had done before, against the national agreement and thus assure the small advantages gained by the unions at local level. This line of action was therefore not tested.

Now the various sections are waiting for the result of the referendum on whether to accept the national agreement or not. Leaving aside the usual confusions designed to fragment the vote — here, 'yes', there, 'no' — the result is still not certain and could re-open the whole affair.

However we can already draw up a balance from our point of view.

Because history is not made with 'ifs', the result of the tram workers' initiative in December is not spectacular, but it has provided an example of the way forward for a serious self defence. Given the context of passivity which we are perhaps now seeing the back of, this in itself is quite a lot. Meanwhile, the growing impoverishment of wage workers increases the possibility of this example repeating itself. From his own, reactionary standpoint Epifani² is right when he said "There is social discontent". (*La Repubblica*, 2.2.04, p9) He added — revealing the reactionary aspect:

Either the union will govern it or it will give way to rebelliousness or corporativism. Certainly there will be an electoral campaign."

The term 'rebelliousness' can be read more accurately as 'social revolt' (and in fact this was the title of *Repubblica's* front page). Whilst for us this is

something to welcome, it is this revolt which Epifani fears and seeks to undermine with his appeals to the clearly reckless government.

A situation of social revolt would rapidly bring a new perspective and enable the further steps at coordination to be taken which were lacking in December and which at the moment still seem far off. By this we mean the cross-sectional link up of workers via elected and revocable assembly delegates. It is here that a revolutionary leadership becomes both necessary and possible. If this fails to materialise and the unions remain in place, such a step forward will certainly not happen. It is not for the unions to propagandise for the steps which will deny them their very existence.

Notes

1 Milan city transport company.

2 General Secretary of CGIL, the main trade union federation.

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Austrian Railway Strikes¹

Capital's attacks on the working class continue unabated in all countries. These attacks are no less vicious when they take place in the state or so called "public sector" rather than the private sector. This was illustrated last November when Austrian railway workers went on strike to defend their jobs, pay and pensions against the plans of the state railway company, the OBB.

These plans involve the breaking up of the loss making railway into four main companies under a single holding company. Each company will be responsible for different functions such as track and infrastructure, passenger and freight services etc. Although in the short term the railway will remain in state hands, the nature of the reorganisation suggests that privatisation is the ultimate goal. This represents a continuation of the restructuring of capital initiated by the Thatcher regime in the UK over 20 years ago and the abolition of the post war social settlement with the working class. Whilst the British Tories succeeded in privatising most of the major state run enterprises, this process is still ongoing in continental Europe where social democratic structures have proved to be more resilient and governments have been less inclined to rock the social democratic consensus by challenging organised labour head on. However the dynamic of capital accumulation (or rather the lack of it) has no respect for social democratic qualms. In the post-World War Two boom period, nationalisation was the most effective way ensuring the survival of strategic industries and buying a level of social peace. But, as the boom ended to be replaced by a permanent crisis of under investment, nationalised industries have been a millstone round the neck of governments. The privatisation programme provides a new inflow of capital into these otherwise bankrupt industries through the issue of shares. In addition these privatisations represent a devaluation of capital since the constant capital of state utilities (i.e. fixed assets) is always sold off at a fraction of its value and the outstanding debts are written off. The new capital is therefore able to start its operations with a different capital structure,

particularly a smaller constant capital, and is able to operate at a higher rate of profit.

The break up of state industries is not in itself an issue that workers need be concerned with. After all, whether a company is owned by the state or by private capital, workers are still exploited the same. What is of concern is that restructuring packages invariably come with measures designed to up the rate of exploitation by slashing jobs, pay and conditions. This is exactly what has happened in Austria where the railway reorganisation programme will involve between 10 000 and 50 000 redundancies or compulsory "early retirement". On top of that wages will be cut via the abolition of longstanding pay review agreements and pension benefits will also be cut. The management also want to end the social democratic practice of consulting the unions before making major decisions and so give senior management the freedom to do as they please without the charade of consultation.

These are the circumstances that led to the railway workers walking out in November. The strike was called for and organised by the union and commanded 100% support from the workers. They demanded a partial withdrawal of some of the reorganisation measures. The strike put pressure on the government as industries immediately felt the impact. However after three days the strike was over and the railway workers went back to work. The union leaders were concerned that the strike was damaging its own industry and the "national interest" plus the union was threatened with legal action by various industries for compensation for losses caused by the strike. Consequently the Social Democratic union called off the strike without any reference to the workers and, even before the union's own strike committee was aware of the compromise deal being negotiated by the union leaders. Needless to say the compromise benefits the government rather than the workers.

The strike is significant only as a classic illustration of how workers should not struggle in the current period. In all

countries the unions are to a greater or lesser degree integrated into the apparatus of the state. This is clearly the case with the OBB which is closely linked to the opposition Social Democratic Party just as British unions are largely affiliated to the Labour Party. However it is not just their links with bourgeois political parties that makes the unions sabotage the strikes they initiate. In this epoch every struggle implicitly challenges the basis of capital itself which, due to its crisis of accumulation, is driven to attack rather than offer improvements to workers' conditions. Because of their economic role as the brokers of wage labour, the unions have no more interest than the bosses in supporting struggles which implicitly call into question the very nature of wage labour itself. Regrettably time and time again we see the unions deflecting workers anger by calling strikes and then selling them out. The more protracted example of the British fire-fighters strike last year is another typical example of how the unions channel workers' militancy into dead end defeats and hopeless compromises. The only way workers can wage effective class struggle is outside of, against and beyond the unions. This involves workers organising for themselves and recognising that their interests are not the interests of "their" industry or "their" country. The struggle Austrian rail workers should be contrasted with that of the Milan tram workers, which we report on in this edition, see "First sign of a revival." The Milan workers organised themselves outside of the trade unions through depot committees. These area committees served as a vehicle for organising the fight and have the potential for generalisation into area and city wide organisations to bring in more workers from different sectors into a general struggle. This is the only way forward.

PBD

Note

¹ This article is based on reports on the strike sent us by an Austrian comrade who is a supporter of the IBRP

Africa

Showcase of ... Capitalist Decline

In the last 5 years over a quarter of Africa's 53 countries were in a state of armed conflict. The scale of death, social disintegration and human suffering which has taken place is simply staggering. The genocide in Rwanda, the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and related wars in the great lakes region alone are now estimated to have claimed 5 million lives, 3 million of these have been in the DRC civil war. The Sudanese civil war has left 2 million dead, the Angolan war 0.5 million and once the more minor conflicts such as those in Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, etc. are included the numbers killed in the last two decades is equivalent to the entire death toll of the first world war. The number of refugees in the continent is now estimated to be 14 million¹, 88 million are in urgent need of food aid and 340 million, or half the continents population, live on less than \$1 per day.²

The economic collapse of Sub Saharan Africa can be seen in the following 3 statistics alone. The first is its decreased importance in world trade. Whereas in the mid '70's Africa accounted for 7% of the world's trade, by the mid '90's the percentage had declined to 0.5%. The second is the relative collapse of investment flows into the continent. Whereas in the early '70's it received 30% of the world's total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the late '90's the figure had dropped to 3%. The third statistic is Africa's debt to the metropolitan countries, which has risen from \$84bn at the time that the debt crisis broke in 1982, to \$300bn in 2002. Africa is now in a position of "debt peonage" where its debt cannot be paid off and instead increases inexorably. It has become a net exporter of capital to the metropolitan countries. Africa's economic decline will be considered in more detail below, however, these few facts are enough to point to the underlying cause of the wars and savagery sweeping the continent.

The last 18 months, however, have brought an apparent outbreak of peace.

Through the pressure of US imperialism and the direct intervention of European and US forces in certain countries peace deals of a sort have been agreed. For example wars have been ended in Ethiopia/Eritrea, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan while order has been resorted in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. Do these peace deals mean that a corner has been turned and that Africa can emerge from the dark period of the last two decades? Or are these events merely a temporary halt in the slide into economic collapse and barbarism? To answer these questions it is necessary to understand the material causes of the present catastrophe and Africa's position in the structure of global capitalism. We will consider this briefly below.

Africa under the boot of imperialism

After the end of the Second World War the US insisted that the European empires were demolished so that all these areas could be opened up to US capital. At independence, which was granted in the '50's and '60's, the native bourgeoisie in the colonised countries was extremely weak or non existent. Under these circumstances the elites who found themselves in control of the states of the newly independent countries adopted policies of state capitalism. The state carried out nationalisations and acted as an essential vehicle in the accumulation of capital. For much of Africa this could only be achieved by military rule. As we wrote in the '70's,

*The chronic backwardness of the economy over Africa demands the strictest control and state directed efforts at accumulation. Within this framework there is less room for the pretence of bourgeois democracy and military rule is the most suitable form.*³

The need for the state to supervise economic life caused the new ruling classes of certain states to gravitate towards the Russian bloc and to seek their assistance in developing a state capitalist economy. This posed a threat

to US capital; a threat which potentially undermined the whole basis on which the US had forced the Europeans to grant independence. It produced a determined reaction from the US which, under the Truman Doctrine of 1947, opposed any moves by African countries towards the Russian bloc. This included direct military intervention to remove regimes, such as the removal of the Lumumba regime in the Congo, and the organising of military coups such as the one which brought Mobutu to power in Zaire. Through these efforts most African states remained dominated by the capital of the former colonial masters together with US capital. Infrastructure, utilities and certain key industries were held by the state and a large bureaucracy supervised and regulated the economy. In this period foreign capital was happy to see the strengthening of national states even though this entailed enormous corruption and wastage. The crisis of the early '70's was to dramatically reverse this.

The collapse of the Bretton Woods agreement, which had underpinned the global recovery following World War Two by providing stability of currencies with a US dollar backed by gold, produced a sharp weakening of the western bloc. Currencies started to float against each other, massive currency inflation followed and prices of commodities rose. For Africa, the inflation of the '70's and the dramatic increase in energy prices led to vast borrowing from the metropolitan countries. This borrowing, which entailed the recycling of petrodollars, was encouraged at the time by the rulers of the western bloc, in particular their agencies the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as a means of preventing peripheral countries falling into the Russian bloc. For capitalism as a whole the '70's represented a turning point. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system was a clear indication that the accumulation period following World War 2 had come to an end and the capitalist system faced an impasse. As we have written elsewhere this impasse, which was caused

by capitalism's tendential fall in profit rate and expressed itself in the crises of the international financial system, provoked a bold change in tactic. Gradually the outlines of the new strategy emerged under the banner of globalisation. For the metropolitan countries this meant a restructuring of production, the devaluation and internationalisation of capital held by the state through privatisation, the movement of capital to regions of cheaper labour power and a new international division of labour. Whereas in the post war reconstruction period the driving force of the international economy was trade, in the new period the export of capital. In many respects this was a return to the position which existed before the First World War described by Lenin in his pamphlet "Imperialism the highest stage of capitalism." During the period 1980 to 1997 global Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) outflows increased at an

average annual rate of 13% whereas the growth of world exports increased at a rate of 7%. In the same period the stock of FDI increased from \$700bn to \$7100bn.

⁴ International capitalist relations were deepened and enormous flows of capital went to the peripheral areas of the world, notably south East Asia and South America. It is estimated that the actual size of the world proletariat has doubled since the '70's.⁵ As more and cheaper labour power has been sucked into the labour/capital relationship the fall in the average rate of profit, which reached its low point in the '70's, has been checked and the system gained the oxygen it needed to survive. The mass of profit has also been vastly increased. In 1983, for the first time ever, capital outflows from the peripheral countries exceeded capital inflows.⁶ It is now the case that the peripheral countries pay the core, or metropolitan countries, approximately \$160bn annually.⁷ It has been calculated that in the period 1980 to 1986 alone total repayments, including profits and interests, from the peripheral countries to the metropolitan countries amounted to \$250bn which, allowing for inflation, is four times the amount lent by the US to Europe under the Marshall aid programme immediately after the Second

World War! Globalisation, as a strategy, has been extraordinarily successful in shifting the burden of the crisis from the countries at capitalism's centre to those of the periphery.

As can be seen from the Table, Africa has reaped little benefit from the flows of FDI, which have mostly gone to South East Asia and Latin America. Africa's share of the total FDI is today one tenth of what it was in the early '70's. Similarly, during the period of the early '70's to the late '90's, Africa's share of world manufacturing declined from 1.2% to 0.4%, its share of total world trade from 7% to 0.5% and per capita income has declined 30%. The debt crisis of the early '80's has allowed international capital, through the agencies of the World Bank the IMF and the Paris Club of lenders, to get a stranglehold over most Sub Saharan African countries. During the

Wages become "flexible" and state benefits are withdrawn.

- Expansion of exports. This invariably involves production of cash crops in the place of subsistence farming and increase in the export of raw materials all aimed at paying off the debt.

These measures, which have been applied even in countries without IMF imposed SAPs, have produced a profound weakening of most Sub Saharan African states. The vehicle which had previously served as the engine of national capital accumulation and national development was cut to pieces and the state capitalist economies, built up in the post war period, were shattered. These states have been economically and politically crushed by the forces of international capital. All pretence at national development has now been abandoned

Period	'73-'76		'77-'82		'83-'89		'90-'93		'95-'98	
	\$bn	%	\$bn	%	\$bn	%	\$bn	%	\$bn	%
Africa	1.1	19.3	0.8	7	1.1	8.3	1.4	4	3.8	2.7
Asia	1.3	22.8	2.7	24	5.2	39.0	19.8	58	83.7	59.0
Middle East	1.0	17.5	2.5	22	2.6	19.5	1.6	5	2.0	1.4
Latin and S. America	2.2	38.6	5.3	47	4.4	33.0	11.0	32	52.5	37.0
Total	5.7		11.2		13.3		34.2		142	

Table: Net foreign direct investment to developing countries. Annual averages

early '80's African states were forced to renegotiate their loans at floating interest rates and to accept Structural Adjustment Plans (SAPs) as a condition of further lending. SAPs have been applied to two thirds of all Sub Saharan African countries. These programmes consist of four main elements. These are:

- Liberalisation. This is aimed at promoting free movement of capital and opening the national market to competition. This often includes currency devaluation.
- Privatisation. State assets, public utilities and services are sold off.
- Deregulation. Prices are allowed to rise as subsidies are withdrawn, e.g. from food and energy.

and instead these states serve as local agencies of the mechanism whereby capital is transferred from Africa to the metropolitan countries.

The concentration on cash crops or export of commodities and raw materials immediately brought a drop in their prices, producing a sharp decline in the terms of trade for African countries. Privatisation, together with currency devaluation meant the profitable state assets were generally transferred to capitalists in the metropolitan countries while deregulation of labour markets produced a pool of unemployed prepared at work for starvation wages. All these developments were of great benefit to capital in the metropolitan countries. Trans-national Corporations,

whose interests are expressed by the World Bank and the IMF, have profited from the fall in commodity prices from peripheral countries. They have also profited from privatisations which have allowed them to expand their activities into new regions, particularly in the fields of telecommunications and public utilities, while deregulation has produced an ample supply of cheap labour power.

For the African countries these changes have been disastrous. Certain states have literally imploded and declined into civil war, anarchy, war lordism and barbarism. Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia are a few recent examples of this. Others which have been more successful in meeting the demands of the new order have seen massive impoverishment of their people, breakdown of services, and social dislocation. All these things lay the basis for war and disintegration. Some brief descriptions will illustrate what has occurred.

- In Rwanda the SAP of 1990 resulted in a massive increase in poverty, particularly poverty amongst the rural Hutu peasantry, thereby helping to fuel the genocide of 1994.

- In Sudan abolition of price controls under the 1990 SAP caused prices to rocket. Inflation rose from 67% in 1990 to 130% in 1996. Privatisation of utilities caused prices of electricity, education and health to rise and workers' standard of living fell dramatically. The minimum wage now only covers 25% of the cost of living. State workers, such as teachers, have not been paid their salaries for 6 months and many workers have to take second jobs.

- In Mozambique the state has been virtually destroyed by the pressures of civil war and economic collapse. Privatisation has taken place in banking, cotton, agriculture, health and education. The ports of Maputo and Beira have been privatised and a European consortium of capitalists now has a 15 year concession to develop and operate them. In the privatisations 37 000 workers were retrenched. Mozambique is now one of the poorest countries in the world.

- In Zimbabwe, which was one of Africa's rich countries, the IMF programmes have increased the national debt to 100% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Zimbabwe chose to defy the IMF in the mid '90's

and in 1995 lending was suspended. What followed is an indication of what happens to countries which refuse to submit to their programmes. Real GDP has fallen 37% since 1998 and average income is equal to what it was in 1960. Interest rates are 95% and inflation is 700%. Unemployment is over 60% and there is a chronic shortage of food, electricity, fuel and foreign exchange. The country stands on the threshold of civil war.

- In Uganda, the one country which the IMF claims as a success story, despite some growth severe hardship has been imposed on the urban and rural working class. Formal employment has dropped to only 14% of the economically active population. Half the civil service, 170 000 workers, have been made redundant. Government health facilities now lack equipment and medicine. Small scale local capital has collapsed.

- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Mobutu regime reacted to the economic crisis by slashing state spending and laying off workers. In 1995, the year before the war started, 300 000 civil servants were laid off. This contributed to the start of the war.

These statistics illustrate that the fundamental cause of the collapse, social disintegration and war which ravage Africa is the crisis of the capitalist system itself. In particular it is the structural position Africa occupies in the international structure of capitalism and the management of Africa by banking and financial capital which is making the situation worse than other regions of the world.

Containing the collapse

The capitalist classes who rule US and Europe have, of course, got no interest in bringing about the collapse of African states. Such collapses prevent debt repayment and undermine supplies of raw materials. Also the collapse of states can provide an opportunity for the enemies of the US, those the US calls terrorists, to organise in that territory and launch attacks on the US from it. On the one hand capital needs to continue the savage exploitation of Sub Saharan Africa, but on the other it does not wish this exploitation to destroy the structures which supervise this exploitation. The US and Europe have therefore tried to contain this situation through measures such as debt relief for bankrupt states,

military intervention in various theatres of war and exerting pressure for peace. These policies are policies of containing the effects of the crisis rather than attempts to solve it.

The Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative is supposedly going to result in debt forgiveness. Of the 42 countries which are classed as HIPC, 33 are in Sub Saharan Africa. This programme is failing because the conditions imposed on the countries which accept the debt relief are as bad as the debt itself. These conditions are a version of those of the SAP conditions and will ensure that these countries remain in absolute poverty. So far only 6 countries worldwide have agreed to have their debts written off under these terms. The fact that there has been so little progress on debt relief should not surprise us since the capitalist class wants and has always wanted debts and interest repaid.

A further means of containing the disintegration of African states is direct military intervention and occupation. We are now seeing ex-colonial powers sending their troops back into the former colonies as the British and French have done in Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. The US have similarly sent their troops into Liberia, the state founded by former US slaves in 1847. At the same time the US is sponsoring a lull in the continent's main wars.

The debt relief initiative and the military intervention do not, however, indicate a change in heart by the metropolitan capitalist class. One only needs to compare the reactions of the US and Europe to the crisis in the Balkans, or the crisis over Iraq and their reactions to the Rwandan genocide or the horrific slaughter in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to understand how marginal Africa is in regard to their interests. Rather these measures indicate an attempt to contain a situation which could, in due course, threaten their interests. Nor is it possible to say that these events indicate that the slide of Africa into economic collapse and barbarism has been halted.

African renaissance?

Much of the African ruling class realises the hopeless situation in which Africa finds itself and dreams of an African renaissance outside of the grip of the World Bank and IMF. In 2001

the Organisation of African Unity, which has since changed its name to the African Union (AU), authorised Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa to form the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). This became the development programme of the AU. NEPAD aims to achieve an African growth rate of 7% and calculates \$64bn of capital will be needed annually. This is to be invested on large scale projects in energy, infrastructure and communications which, it is hoped, will provide the foundation for the rejuvenation of African economies. The wildly unrealistic nature of this plan is apparent when we discover that the bulk of the capital required is to come from the G7 countries in the form of FDI. The present figure for FDI to Africa is \$3.8bn. The centres of finance and banking capital, which at present hold Africa in a vice grip, are expected to behave in a philanthropic way to assist African development! Why does NEPAD think they should have this change of heart? Because, NEPAD argues, African countries will offer good investment opportunities, low tax repatriation of profits, peace, stability, democracy good governance and all the rest of it. Capital will only be invested in Africa when capitalists are assured of a rate of profit comparable to that in South East Asia or South America. NEPAD is quite unable to offer this and similarly the AU is unable to provide peace and stability anywhere in Africa. Since NEPAD was founded investment conditions have deteriorated rather than improved.

Recent events such as the peace moves in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone etc. show that the only force able to bring peace of any sort is that of US imperialism. This is because US and Europe are behind the wars to start with. Sections of US and European capital have benefited from almost all Africa's wars through buying cheap raw materials from the combatants, e.g. diamonds, cobalt, coltan

etc., while selling them arms. US interest in Africa is primarily in its raw materials, though it has a strategic interest in excluding its European rivals, particularly France, from exploiting these resources. The most pressing interest the US has in Africa at present is getting its hands on Africa's oil.

Exploiting Africa's oil

There is one sector in which the African continent is receiving investment and that is the oil sector. In 2003 two US oil companies Exxon-Mobil and Chevron-Texaco together with operators Amerada Hess and Marathon and Ocean Energy together invested \$10bn in African oil.⁸ It is the US policy of finding alternative supplies to those of the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, which is behind the US strategy of getting its hands on African oil. This, in turn, is what is behind the US attempts to bring some of Africa's wars to a halt. Sudan, where the oil concessions are below an area of fighting, is an obvious example of this. Walter Kansteiner, the US undersecretary of state for African affairs, bluntly stated the US case when he said:

African oil has become a national strategic interest.⁹

President Bush's African tour in July 2003 was to lay the basis for a new

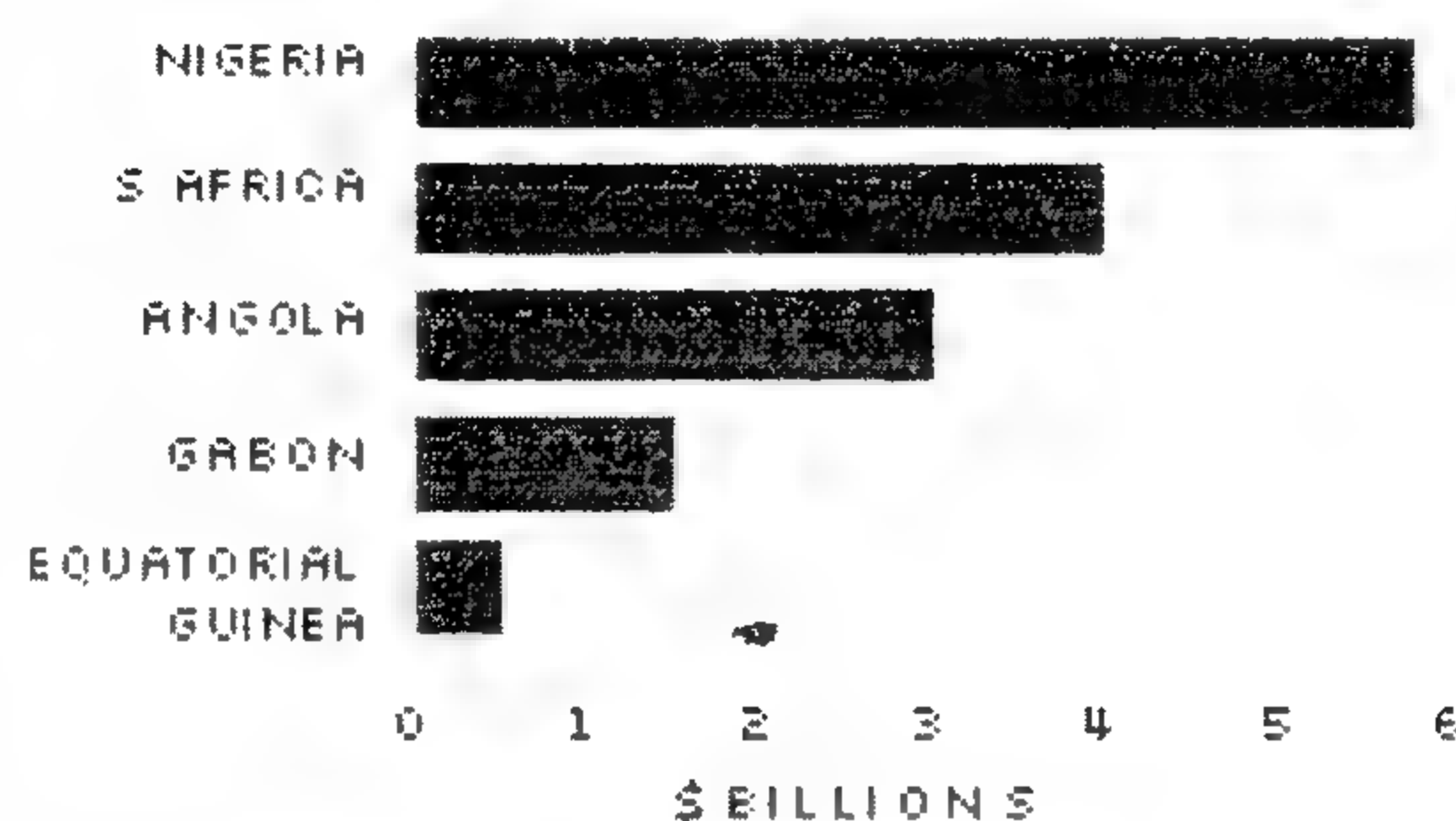
thrust of US oil companies into Africa and was followed up in September by a meeting in Washington with the heads of state of 10 countries in the gulf of Guinea where the most promising oil deposits are. (See map below.)

Africa's total oil reserves amount to 80bn barrels, or 8% of the world's total, which when compared to the resources of the Middle East are small. For example, Iraq alone has reserves of 112.5bn barrels. At present the US, which imports 55% of its oil, gets 1.3 million barrels per day (mb/d) or 16% of its imports from Africa, but plans to increase this figure to 2.1 mb/d or 25% by 2015. African oil has three major advantages for the US, these are:

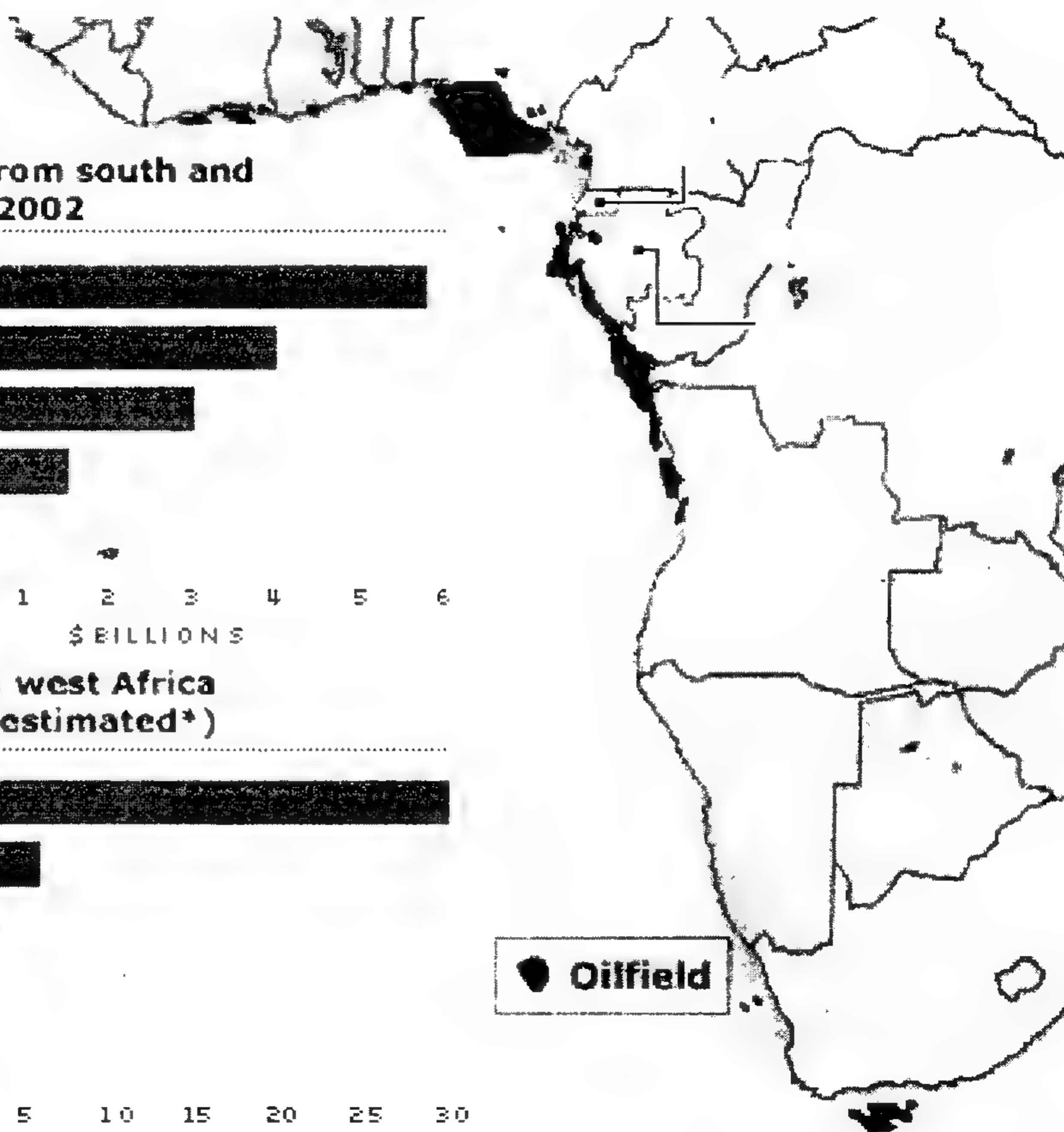
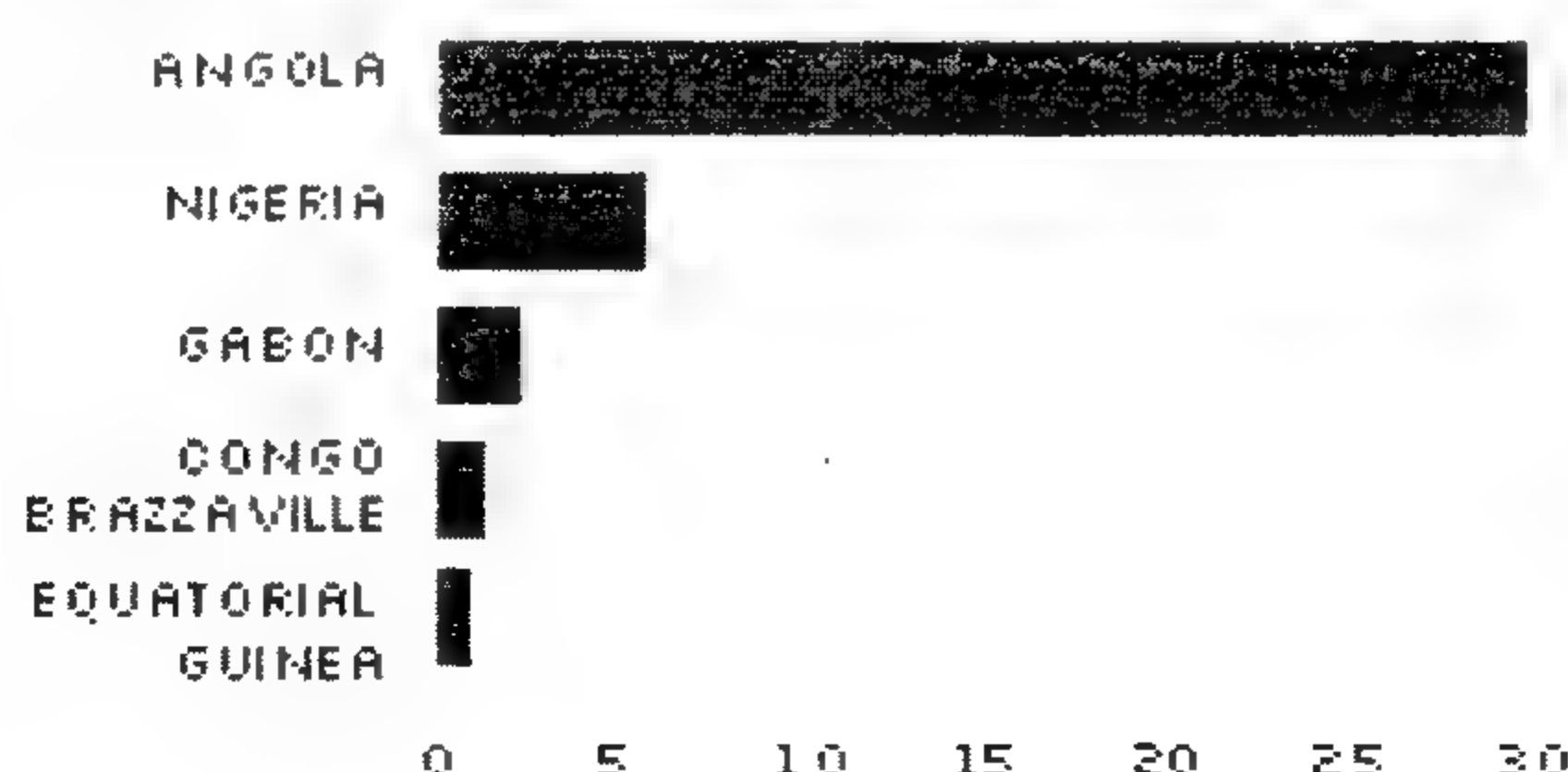
- African oil producers, with the exception of Nigeria, are all outside OPEC and would not withhold supplies in a crisis,
- Much of Africa's oil is offshore in the Gulf of Guinea and could be protected by the US navy if necessary,
- The oil itself is low in sulphur, and so cheaper to refine than Middle East oil. It is also closer to the US east coast refineries.

US oil companies are scouring Africa for new sources of oil and it is estimated that African oil production will increase 70% in the next five years. The biggest investment is going into

US imports from south and west Africa 2002



Oil reserves, west Africa (bn barrels/estimated*)



the offshore zone, particularly the waters of Nigeria, Gabon, Angola and the island of Sao Tome and Principe. Sao Tome & Principe, previously one of the poorest countries on earth, has recently sold oil concessions to Chevron worth more than 50 times its annual export earnings! However, investment is by no means limited to the offshore reserves as is shown by the recent completion of a 1000km pipeline, which links Chad's oilfields via Cameroon to the Atlantic. This pipeline will deliver 250 000 barrels per day. In addition to the countries mentioned above, US companies are active in Equatorial Guinea, Congo Brazzaville and Sudan.

The US is also preparing to protect its new African oil interests by force and is negotiating with the island state of Sao Tome and Principe, which is strategically positioned at the centre of the Gulf, to establish a naval base there together with a regional command centre.

All this oil development will provide little relief for Africa's destitute people. The struggles of the impoverished people of Nigeria or Angola, who live in the actual areas from which the oil is extracted, to get even a minimal share of the oil wealth for services in their villages, are an illustration of this. Some of the wealth will, of course, go to the political elite and their hired retainers, but the majority will go to the international oil companies and the finance capitalists behind them. What this illustrates, as we have said in previous publications¹⁰, is that African development is determined, not by the needs of its people or even its ruling class, but by the needs of imperialism.

As has occurred in the Middle East, the new US advance has been at the expense of its rivals, particularly France. Despite French attempts to bolster its position in the central African region and its hosting of an African development conference the US has put pressure on many of the oil producing countries to give its companies favourable terms. During the recent auction of concessions by Sao Tome & Principe, for example, Exxon was offered preferential bidding rights. This rivalry points again to the growing imperialist rivalry in this region which has already been expressed in the wars fought in the great lakes region. Such rivalry, in its turn, provides the ground for the continuation of proxy wars in the

regions where US dominance is contested. This is a further indication of the illusory nature of the present moves towards peace in the region.

National Liberation in Africa

We have seen, in what has been said above, that the root cause of the collapse of African economies and states, together with the wars and savagery which accompany this collapse, is the operation of the capitalist system itself. The social disintegration which engulfs so many states of Africa is not the result of tribal rivalry, African backwardness, arbitrary colonial borders or the various other superficial explanations served up by bourgeois commentators, it is rather an expression of the vicious and contradictory nature of the capitalist system of production itself. The barbaric savagery in Africa today expresses the real nature of capitalism and serves as a dreadful warning of what lies ahead for the rest of the world.

Today, there can no longer be any talk of national liberation or national development for Africa. Never, since the period of colonialism, has Africa been more dominated by the imperialist centres. Never has it been less able to develop its national resources. Never has it been less liberated. The African national bourgeoisie have thrown in their lot with the bourgeoisie of the metropolitan countries, and see their only hope to be in acting as agents of international capital. No one any longer even mentions national liberation in Africa. The best the African Union can think of is of a partnership with the G7 capitalists in which they might be given some of the spoils. The idea of national liberation is a curiosity, a souvenir from the post war period when the world was dominated by two imperialist blocs, and when peripheral countries had the possibility of changing allegiance from the US bloc to the Russian one or vice versa. Today the domination is so complete and the burdens placed on Africa are so severe, that the real question for the bourgeoisie is whether the present relationship between Africa and the capitalist centres of North America, Europe and Japan is actually sustainable. Can the export of capital to the metropolitan countries be maintained at the same time as the economic decline and marginalisation of Africa continues? Can the resulting decomposition continue in the longer

term without affecting the core countries of the global system? From even a cursory survey of the situation it is clear that the present relationship is not sustainable in the longer term. The present containment via limited military intervention and charity handouts is a short term measure. More direct military intervention by the metropolitan countries appears likely in the future. This will represent another step in bringing Africa's problems back to the centres of capitalism.

The argument put forward by the Stalinists, Trotskyists and their followers that national liberation weakened imperialism has never looked more ridiculous. As has been shown above national development is today determined by the needs of imperialism not the national bourgeoisie. In fact the process we are witnessing is undermining the whole edifice of national solidarity itself. As the national state becomes an agency in the global structure of transferring surplus value to capitalism's core countries so the basis of national allegiance is lost. As production is divided between different countries and different continents the concepts of national production and national development become meaningless. The principal political argument the Stalinists and Trotskyists advanced for working class support for national liberation struggles, namely that by developing the forces of production the national bourgeoisie would also develop the strength and unity of the working class, has similarly proved to be nonsense. The left communist movement has opposed this position since the 1920's, and argued that the working class should fight for its own interests and not give support to any faction of the national bourgeoisie. The present situation in Africa is a vindication of our positions. By supporting the national bourgeoisie the African working class has been confused and disarmed in the face of the attacks which have been carried out by the very national bourgeoisie they have been supporting. If the working class had refused to give its support to the national bourgeoisie and supported its own class interests throughout, it would be in a stronger position today and better able to resist the massive redundancies, unemployment and impoverishment, which it is suffering at the hands of its own bourgeoisie. The role of the native bourgeoisie as the

enforcers of the demands of metropolitan finance and banking capital is less transparent because of the previous support workers have given them.

The only ray of hope in the present gloomy situation is that the forces of global capitalism are weakening the national states and drawing the world together in a system of global production. This is undermining the illusions of nationalism and laying the material foundation for greater unity of the working class.

The need for communism

The only real solution for Africa's problems is to eliminate the root cause of these problems which is the capitalist system of production. This is the underlying cause of what is wrong, not only in Africa, but throughout the world. Capitalism is a crisis ridden system and the global costs of maintaining it are enormous. It is the contradictions of the system which lead to imperialism, which, in turn, leads to war. The nature of capitalism needs to be understood from its life cycle which moves from general war in which capital values are destroyed and devalued, to reconstruction, to crisis and then to war again. Although generalised war, such as the two world wars of the last century, gives the system the oxygen it requires to

rebuild, the same fundamental problems always recur. Although the crisis struck in the early '70's in the present accumulation cycle, this time our rulers have succeeded in pushing the worst effects of the crisis onto the peripheral areas and reinforcing the imperialist structures which hold these countries in their place. The horrific costs of maintaining the system are seen in the peripheral countries where the working class is paying a terrible price. Unless the system is replaced, the savage exploitation and violence we see in Africa will come to the core countries. Already certain sections of the working class in the metropolitan countries are sinking into conditions which were previously thought to exist in the periphery. The conditions of capitalism's peripheral countries are now coming to the metropolitan countries. Further massive deterioration in living conditions in the core countries can be expected as the price of labour power tends to equalise.

The capitalist system of production needs to be replaced with a more socially advanced system where production will be for human needs instead of profit, where scarcity can be abolished and society's development planned. This society will abolish social classes and bourgeois divisions such as national states. The means of production will be socialised globally and put to work for the benefit of human society as a whole. We call this

system communism. However, it has nothing in common with what existed in Russia, China, Cuba and elsewhere. These systems always were a variety of capitalism where the capital was held by the state, or more exactly a form of state capitalism.

Such a new social order can only be created by the world's workers. Before this can begin to happen, workers need to become conscious of their common interests and the need for a new society. Workers need also to give themselves the political tools for carrying out this task, particularly the international communist party. The CWO is a section of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP) which exists to bring this party into existence. We call on all who agree with what has been said above to contact us to help in the enormous task we face of re-launching the communist programme and creating the global party to fight for its implementation.

CP

Notes

- 1 See US committee for refugees www.refugees.org
- 2 NEPAD figure.
- 3 See RP 6 (old series), Capitalism in Black Africa
- 4 UNCTAD figure
- 5 See D. Coates, *Models of capitalism. Growth or stagnation in the modern era*. Quoted in *Globalisation and the post colonial world*, Ankie Hoogvelt.
- 6 Capital flows include loans loan repayments interest on loans, FDI and portfolio investments. They do not include repatriation of profits on FDI.
- 7 Labour Resource and Research Institute, www.larri.com
- 8 Reported in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2003
- 9 IASP Conference, 25/01/02. Quoted in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2003
- 10 See RP 14, "National Liberation in Africa."

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Permanent War is American Capitalism's Response to the Crisis

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Under the Banners of Imperialism — the Anti-Globalisation Movement at Cancun

Introduction

14 years ago, a world collapsed, but its ruins are still there and the dust continues to blind those it has left behind.

In addition to the wreck of Stalinism — the world we were alluding to — there is a dense rain of debris from the social-democratic “paradise” (of the social state and welfare) demolished by the same explosive which caused the infamous and (apparently) powerful structure of “real socialism” to fold in on itself, namely, the fall of the average rate of profit, the cancer which cannot be eliminated from the capitalist mode of production.

But, as often happens, an ideology which guides the behaviour of human beings, although deprived of its material bases, continues to survive in the world which generated it and even seems to show signs of vitality; rather, this vision of the world appears even more vital the more rapidly the conditions it expresses objectively disappear. Not only this: in an equal and opposed movement, the more the effects of the capitalist crisis become sharpened, the more the ideological residues of this overthrown world decompose and regress, showing all the reactionary content of the political projects and movements originating from this collapse.

Although the principal target of the world bourgeoisie’s furious attacks is the proletariat of the “North” and of the “South of the planet”, its class response is almost absent, or too timid and discontinuous to stand up against this aggression¹. It is the petit bourgeoisie, instead, which raises its voice and imprints its political direction on the magma of the social movements commonly called the anti-globalisation movement, delving into its traditional ideologies and mixing them with the waste of the degenerated Third International, otherwise known as Stalinism.

Nothing new, some might say: basically, ’68, the “season of the movements” was politically hegemonised by a rebellious petit bourgeoisie emerging from the heart of the official “workers’ movement”, which had long since betrayed and disfigured the perspective for communism. Nothing new, if history was a simple repetition of events which were substantially the same, but, here the banality will be excused, it is not like that.

That capitalism, in its fundamental structures, always remains capitalism, despite the transformations it has undergone in 200 and more years, and that, consequently, the classes and sub-classes generally reproduce the same behaviour, is just another affirmation which descends into a tautology. But this does not subtract anything from the fact that the forms in which the clash between the two principal classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat), and the convulsions of a petit bourgeoisie continually reshaped by the evolution of the capitalist mode of production, present new characteristics which revolutionaries must recognise as such, if they do not want to partially deprive themselves of the possibility of changing reality.

To criticise and denounce the profoundly reactionary character of every petit bourgeois movement, because they are constantly oriented towards the past, because they are animated by the true utopia of wanting to humanise capitalism, does not, in fact, mean ignoring with a shrug of the shoulders, or worse, ridiculing, mass movements springing from the upheavals of our time.

In Genoa three hundred thousand imbeciles lined up, according to a journal which defined itself as internationalist, just after the tragic events of G8, but when such an imposing number of “imbeciles” are moved to say in whatever way “enough” to this world, it means that

something is boiling up in the subsoil of society, something which goes well beyond a simple manifestation of collective stupidity. The enormous problem is that this boiling magma, in which there are mixed sectors of the petit bourgeoisie in difficulty, rebellious youth and proletarians intent on expressing an active, however confused, rejection of capitalism, is channelled and directed by the futile and inconsistent fantasies of reformism, which has no concrete perspectives in general, and no class perspective in particular.

It is a reformism which decorates itself with the myths of “defuse Stalinism” to console the sense of defeat and frustration which oppresses the “people of the left”. These myths² grow immensely and acquire power the more the above-mentioned “people” associate any project for the global overthrow of capitalism with the monstrous experience of the Stalinist counter-revolution and believe they are able to deal in this way with the question of the revolutionary assault on bourgeois power, the preliminary act for a true “other possible world”. Every element of the historical patrimony of the theory and practice of the communist movement, already twisted by Stalinist falsification, is further disfigured.

In this way, the question of revolutionary violence is uniquely conceived in the grotesque and deluded manner of the terrorist micro-formations, and, with regard to the problem of power, the moralising (another way of avoiding the issue) and sterile sermons of anarchism are resumed, according to which every form of power is, in itself, “bad”. That, in this bitter soup there are strident contradictions, doesn’t matter: in myths, as in fables, dreams are projected, not the real world.

Waste products of Stalinism, classical reformism and more or less radicalising neo-reformism, therefore constitute the

ideological framework in which the "movements" act, destined to bash their heads against a reality which has nothing to do with their theorising, or, worse still, to be used as a battle formation by this or that bourgeois lineup in the ever more bitter context of world imperialism.

The victory cry which was raised by the anti-globalisation movement at the outcome of the Cancun summit is a perfect example.

The people of the "Third World" reclaiming what is theirs?

In Cancun, Mexico, 10th-14th September, they held the *n*th summit of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In this summit, questions were discussed which have for some time contributed to the climate of distrust, if not open opposition, between the planet's great economic powers, and between these and the bourgeoisie of the so-called developing countries, or, as they are more correctly defined, the countries of the capitalist periphery.

Although the liberalisation and privatisation of public services (or at least of those that are left) by the developing countries especially was an agenda point which was in no way secondary, it was agriculture which was to occupy the scene of both the bitter discussions between the world bourgeoisie and the protests staged by the so-called civil society. In detail, they had to decide on the thorny question of the subsidies that the rich countries offer their own agricultural sectors and the opening to exports coming from the "South", as determined by the much praised "market". In fact, the "South of the World" accused — with reason — the "North" of practising extreme protectionism with regard to its own economy and, in contrast, imposing on the rest of the world neoliberal medicine which it refused to take itself.

That agriculture became (or was always) a strategic matter of primary importance, was not only witnessed by the tragic suicide of the Korean peasant, but by the (widely predicted) failure of the summit itself. The causes

of this failure are due, on the one hand, to the egoistic deafness of the rich countries to the needs of the poor ones, and, on the other, to the fit of pride of the latter, which did not want to bend to the greed of the former. In the face of the arrogance of the "North", the "South of the World" formed a new front, called G21, led by Lula's Brazil³, and said "no" for the first time to the one-way neoliberalism of the economically stronger countries, becoming in this way the shining knights without fear of the peoples of the "South".

This is the legend immediately spread by the leaders of international reformism, which, although containing scraps of truth like every legend, is far from the real motives which led to the *n*th WTO meeting ending with a zero in fact. Instead, Agnoletto declared, in a kind of delusion of omnipotence,

the aim [the failure of the summit] was achieved thanks to a team game realised for the first time between the movement, the NGO's [Non-Governmental Organisations] and the world's poor countries. The G21 countries have dared to defy the US and EU's economic blackmail, also because they were conscious of being able to count on the influence that

The failure of the Cancun summit, neater and more irreparable than that at Seattle, is above all due to the anti-globalisation movement [...] it is without doubt the movement which has greatly weakened in the collective imagination [...] the domination of the 'single thought' [neoliberalism] giving strength to all the state or social oppositions which are trying to stand up against the power of the 'bosses of the world' [...] At the same time, in many countries [...] which have always suffered without respite the arbitrary power of the stronger countries, the governments, pressured by anti-liberal organisations (and in some cases also 'helped' by them in all the aspects concerning the political/technical part of the negotiations) [...] were constrained to assume positions which were more decisive and less subordinated to the dominant countries⁶.

If it is true, as was said earlier, that large parts of the anti-globalisation movement are — more or less consciously — ready to form the flanks of this or that bourgeois formation, it is just as true that Cancun was a further manifestation of the sharpening of imperialist contrasts, the same contrasts which are rendering ever more useless this type of arbitration for world controversies — in the first place between the USA and the emerging European imperialism — which is, or was, provided by the international organisations.

The choreography of the "Red Zone" demonstrations, although tragic and always useless, and the bloody repressions express more the impotence and irresponsibility of reformism than the weakness of the "strong of the World" in their confrontation with civil society. The fact is that each time it is becoming more difficult to mediate between divergent interests in an epoch in which the worsening of the crisis in the capitalist accumulation cycle pushes towards a redefinition of the imperialist order on a world scale. The USA is by far the greatest military power on the planet, but its economic and financial supremacy is seriously menaced (and is in part already compromised) not only by deep internal economic weaknesses, but also by the appearance of



"The Mayan Gods are against the WTO"

But the deities of the real world, the great imperialist powers, are also turning against international organs.

the movement [...] is able to exercise on Western public opinion⁴.

Bernocchi, leader of the Cobas⁵, lined up alongside him and, in a document which could be defined as the manifesto of political opportunism, made things worse with the following evaluation:

wards a redefinition of the imperialist order on a world scale. The USA is by far the greatest military power on the planet, but its economic and financial supremacy is seriously menaced (and is in part already compromised) not only by deep internal economic weaknesses, but also by the appearance of

the euro, although this does not yet have behind it an armed force anywhere near capable of fulfilling even its present role or that which it aspires to. The rupture, the *nth* such, which came to fruition between the USA and EU at Cancun on economic questions is the continuation under other forms of the extreme European — in the first place, German and French — “pacifism” in the face of the US war on Iraq. Some reformist circles, the less militant and perhaps less conditioned by the needs of political propaganda, also recognise how the United States and the European Union are tending to consider large international assemblies as less practicable, that is, less usable to their own advantage, preferring bilateral accords with single countries or the constitution of large protected areas, such as FTAA [Free Trade Area of the Americas], which, if it is born, will render the entire American continent, from Alaska to the Tierra del Fuego an immense hunting reserve for imperialism dressed in stars and stripes⁷. Even Lamy, the European commissioner for commerce and a negotiator at Cancun, has more than once publicly expressed his scepticism with regard to these international organs, judging them to be encumbrances left over from the past and considering bilateral accords more flexible and practical: “The European Union relies above all on treaties adjusted country by country”⁸. Thus, the suspicion becomes more than legitimate that the arrogance and insolence with which some rich countries pressure the poor ones so that they completely open their borders to external investment in exchange for nothing, is not so much due to the habits of those who usually command and those who obey, but reflects instead the badly disguised desire of the rich countries to make constructs — like the international summits — which are no longer useful fail.

It is into this context of great economic clashes and irreconcilable imperialist objectives, that the countries of the so-called G21 have to insert themselves, in their attempt to gather around themselves the remaining countries of the capitalist periphery in their refusal to submit without question — as has been traditional — to the decisions of the “great powers”. And this was enough to unleash — as they say — the enthusiasm of the anti-globalisation organisations, led by the peasant associations of half the world, which immediately saw in the G21 the way

for the oppressed to strike back against neoliberal predominance. Finally, for associations like *Via Campesina* or the *Confédération Paysanne* of José Bové [Peasant Way or Peasant Confederation], it is possible to stop and reverse the process of the industrialisation of agriculture which is sweeping away entire peasant communities across the whole planet, and instead concretely pursue the objective of self-sufficiency, otherwise called food sovereignty.

Obviously, things are much more complex, and, especially, very different from how the deforming eyepieces of reformism want to depict them.

Meanwhile, the G21 group unites states with interests which are contradictory: amongst them there are countries belonging to the “Cairns group”, which contains the world’s major exporters of cereals (excluding the USA, but including Brazil and Argentina), who are more than in favour of an opening of the “rich” markets, and others, like China and India, which are more interested, in the reduction of the gigantic subsidies which the USA and EU apply to their own agriculture. In general, however, the opposition to the USA and EU’s subsidies is common to all the peripheral countries, that is, to their bourgeoisie, who endeavour to cut out a space for themselves between the two “great” litigants.

Only the self-deceiving fantasy of reformism is needed in order to fail to see the obvious, that is, the dominant classes of the “South” (neither more nor less than those of the “North”) pursue exclusively their own class interests, although in a context of subordination to the larger imperialisms.

The social structure of the peripheral countries is strongly marked in the class sense, and, if it is true that their bourgeoisie have until now diligently applied the devastating cures ordered by the International Monetary Fund, it is just as true that the costs have been paid by the masses of the poor and disinherited alone. Just to give an example, it has been calculated that in the last decade

*the ill-gained cash accumulated by the elite of the Third World in hidden accounts is \$600bn, a third of which is kept in Switzerland*⁹

Apart from the moral considerations about the ways this money was earned, which allude to arms trafficking, drugs,

etc., the privatisation which reduced literally millions and millions of people to hunger at the same time enriched in a shameless manner sectors of the old and new bourgeoisie, who, in general, prefer to invest their money in international financial speculation rather than in the extremely fragile productive structures of their own countries. At least this is the case unless, of course, their nation offers attractive rates to international capital to promote the development of a savage industrialisation, as in the special economic zones of China, Vietnam, etc. Thus, these bourgeoisies were very ready for the sacking of their countries when the cyclone of neoliberalism began to blow: and agriculture was among the first to pay the costs.

These states, many of which had only recently achieved independence from the colonial yoke, arrived at “food sovereignty” between 1960 and 1970 by benefiting from the expanding phase of the world economy, which, in its turn, allowed the “green revolution” to be started. This was a series of political economic interventions in which the state played a central role: agrarian reform with the relevant assignation of land to the small peasants, easier credit terms, state bodies for regulated storage and distribution of products with the aim of maintaining remunerative prices, and for aid and promotion of the use of seed grain, fertiliser and pesticides, etc. All measures which allowed a notable augmentation of agricultural productivity, but, by very tightly linking this to the alternating cycles of capital, also posed the premises for the tremors which are shaking this sector (along with the secondary and tertiary sectors) of the world economy and which, in the developing countries, take on a dramatic aspect. In fact, in the preceding decades, many small peasants in the periphery were attracted by the growing prices for primary materials and food products encouraged by state intervention and partially or totally converted their activity to the cultivation of plants destined for export.

Not just this, but in this way — and during the same time — the great multinationals of food and agriculture have become succubi, which, by exercising world oligarchic control¹⁰, are literally seizing millions of agriculturists everywhere in the world by the throat. It is, however, our duty to specify that a

considerable part, if not the majority, of these agriculturists is constituted by wage-labourers, who face a level of exploitation in the plantation system which is simply ferocious. As an example, the collapse in the price of coffee has thrown five million peasant families into the desperation of hunger, but this has also happened to 60 million workers, forcing them to accept even worse wages and conditions of work which are inhuman¹¹. But the fall in the price of coffee is just a detail in the generalised fall of agricultural prices which has continued without perturbation for years, the effect of a comprehensive overproduction of food, caused, in its turn, by the massive investments in constant capital begun in the preceding decades (machines, seed stocks, fertilisers and pesticides). Neoliberal policies, applied even by those governments which declared themselves socialist (!) — Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia, Vietnam, etc. — then dismantled all the state apparatus which sustained small producers (easy credit for small proprietors, veterinary stations, and so on), aggravating an already difficult situation. The resulting alimentary deficit, constrained the import of an enormous quantity of cereals which contributed to the immense growth in external debt (and the interest which goes with it), which, in its turn, has accelerated the demolition of the very weak social state, aggravating misery and, by causing pressure for the abandoning or hyper-exploitation of the land, has compromised the fertility of the soil. In this way, populations have become more exposed to the caprices of the weather: prolonged drought, and excessive rainfall can no longer be considered as just natural phenomena, being co-generated by the irrational and greedy submission of agriculture — and the entire environment — to the laws of capital. Thus, no matter how paradoxical and illogical it may seem — and in effect, it is — it is the very

superabundance, “the global excess of cereal products”¹² which causes chronic undernourishment (that is, hunger) of 800 million and more people across the globe. It is not for nothing that anyone who occupies themselves with agriculture with a minimum of seriousness, underlines how hunger is fundamentally due to the “normal” inequalities of a society divided into classes, as much in the “North” as in the “South”: in the kingdom of mass obesity, the United States, the problem of finding food every day torments no less than 20 million people, and this number is growing, according to the *Manifesto* of 2nd November 2002. Substantially, people do not die because there is not sufficient food, but because they do not have the money to buy it. In

*in question would have almost always allowed the victims of these droughts to be saved [...] Two factors decided, in fact, the survival or certain death of the affected populations: on the one hand the very recent markets for raw materials and the speculations on prices that they encouraged, on the other, the will of the states, more or less influenced by mass protest*¹³.

The undernourishment and hunger which hit wide zones of Europe well within the 20th century had their origin in the same merciless mechanisms of capitalist accumulation:

Even those who belonged to the generation of the final years of the last century [here, the 19th] remember the old people of their infancy, above all among the poor, still grieving for the epoch before national unity as for a type of lost golden age, above all for the good market in foodstuffs under the Bourbons and the Austrians. All the economic history of the first decades of united Italy was a story of the struggle of the poor classes against the growing cost of living, the duties on grain, the taxes on flour and pasta and other modern duties which substituted general hunger for a lost

*abundance of food, even if this was exaggerated in the memory.*¹⁴

Today, too, the rule is that, while entire regions of a country are raped by hunger and the diseases that come with it, in other regions foodstuffs are tranquilly exported to external markets, or, in every case, to “solvent consumers”¹⁵. The self-interested food “aid”, generally coming from the “West”, in reality serves mainly to dispose of agricultural surplus, to enrich the local elites who manage the “aid” and to depress the internal prices for agricultural products, further pushing the small farmers towards the abyss. And this is without mentioning the fact that often “humanitarian” intervention by international agencies



They may have won: but hunger will still increase, as the basic problem is not the WTO but the imperialist division of the world, the inevitable outcome of the present phase of the capitalism. Real victory for the proletariat (and humanity in general) lies not in a utopian reformist reversion to an earlier capitalism, but the end of capitalism itself.

fact, in distinction to the pre-capitalist modes of production, in which death by starvation (of the dominated classes, it goes without saying) was due to an effective dearth of food, it is only when the laws of the market totally take over agriculture that hunger co-exists with abundance, if not with waste, of food. The great famines, which in the final decades of the nineteenth century struck many colonial countries and Russia, which was only then entering the vortex of world capitalism, were only secondarily the consequence of natural events:

Although the bad harvest and the lack of water had reached dramatic proportions [...] the reserves of cereals available elsewhere in the countries

is subordinated to the application of the IMF's cures, the acceptance of genetically modified cereals, and the acquisition of machinery, seed stocks, etc. from the countries which so generously help the starving¹⁶. In sum, they are a shrewd, deceptive and deadly instrument for the further subjection of the developing countries to the rich ones.

We have already said that the local bourgeoisies are also directly responsible for the exploitation and hunger of their "own" disinherited masses; more than this, it is necessary to emphasise how they dust off Third-Worldist ideology to hide the aspirations of their own regional imperialism and to attract the more politically uncultured reformists (who are not small in number). We have seen what Agnoletto and Bernocchi think, but, to give chapter and verse one has to think of the adviser to Ralph Nader, the "radical" candidate in the last US presidential elections, who, in the *Manifesto* of 16th September 2003, clarified that the South-African president "had even asked the anti-WTO organisations for help". Very good, South Africa! The end of apartheid has not in fact attenuated the strongly class characteristics of this nation, and even less modified its tradition imperialist strategy aimed at widening or consolidating its economic, political and military influence in the Southern part of the African continent. Rather, the fall of the hateful racist regime has given international legitimacy to the old Afrikaaner bourgeoisie (and to the rising Black bourgeoisie), which is one of the principal beneficiaries of the privatisation of the most fertile soil promoted by Angola and Mozambique; on the ex-state lands it implanted large agricultural firms, often cultivated with genetically modified (GM) seed — of which South Africa is one of the largest producers — and managed according to systems which are midway between serfdom and apartheid, in which proletarianised peasants who have become day-labourers earn even less than they do in South Africa¹⁷. The redistribution of the land itself, which was among the basic points of the historic programme of the African National Congress, remains one of the many promises which have not been kept¹⁸. The very same thing could be said about Brazil, where 65.7% of the cultivable land belongs to 2.8% of the owners, or, in

other words, 88.4% of the land, and all the best land, belongs to the richest 20% of the owners¹⁹; here, too, Lula, while asking the peasants without land (*Sem Terra*) to be patient and to make no more occupations through the mouthpiece of his Minister for Agrarian Reform, Rossetto (who belongs to one of the protean Trotskyist currents), drastically cuts the funds necessary for the reform.

Expanding Mercosur's²⁰ area of influence in Southern Africa, reinforcing and extending Mercosur's function in opposition to the FTAA, promoting bilateral accords with the Europe of the 15, burrowing into the conflict between the USA and EU to try and draw the maximum advantage: this is the significance of the G21, and not the halting, or reversing, of the inherent tendencies of capitalism. The expropriation of agrarian communities and small peasants with open violence or the impersonal violence of the market, the concentration of the ownership of land, starting with the best, in the hands of a few — the agrarian version of the concentration and centralisation of capital in general — has always accompanied the life of capitalism, within and outside its European cradle. Today, all this is particularly evident in the countries of the capitalist periphery, where, as they say, the "green revolution" and national agrarian reforms first slowed down, but then accelerated, the proletarianisation process. Demographic increase, which fragmented small properties, the possession of the less fertile land, the difficulty of obtaining significant credit enabling the completion of a leap in quality for the small concern, the obvious impossibility of competing with the large concerns, etc., reduced hundreds of millions of peasants to the state of proletarians or harshly treated appendices of the great farms. Between 1960 and 1980, 30 million peasants lost their land in Brazil, between 1965 and 1995 across Latin America and the Caribbean more than 120 million people were constrained to leave the countryside and move to the immense barrack towns of the continent²¹. The same goes for Africa and Asia. In China alone they count at least 130 million "excess" agriculturalists. In short, in the world today there are around 500 million (and increasing) landless peasants and 400 million who own less than they need to live above the threshold of misery by the smallest degree²².

Archaeological survivals: the so-called alternative agriculture

In Europe, instead, and in general in the capitalist metropolises, for some time the peasant has almost disappeared as a social category²³, although agriculture remains an extremely important sector in some ways. However, one of the animators of the anti-globalisation movement is precisely the peasant movements, which has found its charismatic leader in José Bové. Without doubt, among the reasons for their media success is the evident decline in the quality of food — or its dangerousness; see mad cow disease — of the environment and of life in its entirety, which favours, in the absence of class reference points, the cyclical reflowering of petit bourgeois utopias.

But what do these neo-Proudhonists want? Starting from the critique of the "productivist" agriculture which serves the large agricultural and food companies, they want a comprehensive restructuring of the sector, which would give privileges exclusively to small producers. The principal target of their protests is the system of subsidies that the USA and the EU (and others) grant to the large firms, often multinationals, and, in general, to large-scale farms. They hold that this aid, in particular that for exports, has a distorting effect on prices, that it is dumping, whose principal, but not unique, victims are the small producers of the "North" and, especially, the "South", who are unable to withstand the competition from underpriced goods. All this is indubitably true; however, the subsidies, the "restitution" for exports, etc., are supplementary weapons which are at the disposal of large capital in competition, without excluding blows which shake the world market; but the basic fact is that the small producer is destined to disappear in the clash with the large one, because of the crushing disparity of forces. Even if the USA and the EU were to totally eliminate their subsidies, the enormous difference in productivity between the great and the small, between the "North" and the "South" would be enough (and by some distance) to sweep away the weak productive structures of the latter (and of the small producers in general). This difference has assumed colossal dimensions in the last 50 years: agricultural productivity in the countries of the "North", "which

is a function of mechanisation (which it has almost exclusively on the world scale) and of the area which each concern has at its disposal, oscillates between 10 000 and 20 000 quintals²⁴ of cereal equivalent per worker per year", while the "South's" peasants after the "green revolution (fertilisers, pesticides and selected seed stock) although little mechanised" achieve a productivity "which oscillates between 100 and 150 quintals per worker"; while the poorest, instead, "sell around 10 quintals per agriculturist"²⁵. According to Amin, if the remaining half-destroyed barriers which, in various ways, at least partially prevent the periphery's agriculture from being totally absorbed by the rule of the market, were to fall, then, in a few decades, the great international capitals would be able to sweep away billions of peasants and there would remain on the market no more than 20 million firms perfectly able to satisfy the demand of the "solvent urban consumers". The "excess" millions could not be absorbed even if the economy was to grow at 7% per annum without interruption over the 50 years²⁶. Amin, Bové and all their anti-globalisation colleagues see these things, but as good reformists, rather, reactionaries, the alternatives that they indicate without fail tend towards projects for the democratisation of the market and the taming of the savage instincts of capitalism. And now, here are the newest, flambant recipes of the hostilities of the future, written only... two hundred years ago, on the need to institute an equitable market, on the state's duty to make democracy respected and to guarantee fair (!) prices, that is, remunerative ones for the peasants, to protect with customs barriers, if not with a national

democratic and solid spirit, the small producers from the avidity of the multinationals, and so on²⁷. It is obvious that any reference, however vague, to an anti-capitalist perspective, is not just totally absent, but is explicitly rejected²⁸. Bové and company are indeed against subsidies, but only those destined for large capital (the principal beneficiaries by far), opposing the EU's CAP (Common Agricultural Policy), but only (or almost only) because for about a decade the "aid" has begun to diminish, or rather, be directed elsewhere, privileging, once more, the most competitive concerns, that is, those of larger size. In fact, for years the European Union has devoted almost half of its overall budget to agriculture, utilising it either as a shock-absorber and stabiliser for a social sector which otherwise would have been swept away²⁹, or, especially, as a support for large agricultural and food businesses proper, and, indirectly, for industrial businesses, like the manufacturers of farm machinery. This too renders rather bizarre the thesis, held in certain circles, according to which agriculture is now simply a "service" to society, as it is a sector unproductive of surplus value, as it is abundantly subsidised by the state. According to this yardstick, the workers of John Deere or FIAT Tractors and all the other industries involved, would no longer produce a drop of surplus value and it could not be understood where profit comes from.

But, to return to our subject, it is said that from 1992 on, the CAP has progressively shifted its aid from the "red box" to the "green box", or rather from support for prices and production, to that linked to the cultivable surface of the concern, independently of whether anything is produced. It doesn't take much to understand that the larger the concern, the greater the help received and that this intervention sharpens the difficulties of the small agriculturists, accelerating their crisis³⁰. Bové himself, in his book/manifesto, reports the progressive and constant reduction both of the numbers of peasants as well as of small and medium stock-breeders, absorbed and/or elimi-

nated by the large stock-breeders, who, exactly as industrial capital, delocalise the stock-farms/camps to the European East or to the "Third World", where there are no sanitary or hygienic norms worthy of the name, neither for the animals nor for the workers, who, on top of everything else, are paid very little³¹. It is the "Western" face of the same process which in the (so-called) developing countries assumes tragic aspects: in the East, the suicides of peasants driven from the land and reduced to hunger, number thousands every year.

To the rural utopias of the anti-globalists, one can and should raise the same objection which we make against their urban twin sisters of the trade unions of the "base": if the peasants have the power to place a leash and muzzle on the agricultural and food multinationals, if they were to succeed — magically — in creating a capitalism where harmony and fair prices reign, why not directly eliminate capitalism itself? This is the insoluble primary contradiction from which all the other, no less strident, contradictions are derived, starting with that of subsidies: no to the "green box", no to the multinationals, because they fatten themselves on improper contributions from citizens, yes to peasants linked to the territory, to agri-tourism³², to "genuine produce". But, even with effort, it cannot be understood, with this logic, unless one abandons oneself to blind faith in the superior ethical value (!) of the "small", why the "citizens", that is, the proletarians, should have to finance the producers of foods and pastimes enjoyed almost exclusively by the bourgeoisie through their taxes. Moreover, given that, as was already mentioned above, the "peasants" are explicitly demanding the constitution of a national market or even regions hyper-protected from international agricultural prices which are decisively lower³³, it cannot be even understood why industrial capital would be able to accept a general hike in the prices of agricultural produces and raw materials, which would inevitably have repercussions on wages, unless exploitation is not intensified to insane levels. Finally, if one wants to complete the framework of this "paradise on Earth", it would be necessary to transfer incalculable riches from the "North" to the "South" to enable the enormous masses of miserable peasants to reach the living standard of the "North", to liberate women, now

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at the level of agricultural and domestic beasts of burden, from a life of physical brutality and oppression without hope. And all this is supposed to be obtained by allying with Lula and South Africa, or injecting massive doses of democracy into international bodies or the European Union, whose intransigence against the invasion of genetically modified organisms (GMO's) aimed at by the USA has inspired the tactical and strategic enthusiasm of not a few anti-globalisation activists.

In reality, even as far as regards this last aspect, the decisive rejection of GMO's on the part of the Europeans is derived both from the legitimate distrust animating public opinion in the old continent, and also, and especially, by the fact that the United States almost has a world monopoly on GMO's³⁴ and opening the doors to them would mean putting European agriculture in the hands of its imperialist rival dressed in stars and stripes. In fact, not only are many of the varieties of GM plants sterile, that is, once they have been harvested, it is pointless to sow the seeds, but these cultures need specific fertilisers and pesticides which are exclusively supplied by American multinationals. For this reason too, therefore, there is more information on a question which is so controversial: if European agricultural and food capital had large interests in the GMO sector, it is certain that we would witness here too media campaigns in favour of their adoption or the usual deafening silence which regularly suffocates other

problems of enormous social relevance, just as in the United States. This is without counting that it is precisely from the USA that the majority of the imitations of European quality (cheeses, wines, salami, etc.) which compete shamelessly in a rapidly growing sector — although reserved mainly for the bourgeoisie — of the American market.

Conclusions

Throughout its trajectory across a century and a half, the revolutionary movement has periodically needed to combat on the theoretical and political (including the military) level against utopian and reactionary expressions of a perhaps romantic past, which does not want to die, of ideological confusion and social insecurities generated by the upheavals that the functioning of the capitalist mode of production inevitably carries within itself. It is not for nothing that Bové is inspired by the community of artisan-worker clockmakers of the Swiss Jura³⁵, now on the way to extinction, which in the 1870's constituted one of the principal strongholds of anarchism in its struggle against the First International directed by Marx and Engels. The preciseness with which the energetic French peasant refers to this experience is equal to the vulgar superficiality and extremely rough approximations with which he describes Marxism. Thus, it is like the arguments of all the modern supporters of small peasant property as the sole, and superior, alternative to

industrialised agriculture, more or less the same that Lenin brilliantly demolished a century ago, in the political battle against the populist and conservative theoreticians³⁶. But the fact that the petit bourgeois recipes for the future have been defeated once, does not actually mean that they have been defeated for ever. As the evidence shows us. The future of humanity is certainly to be found neither in the

hyper-productivism which poisons everything, destroying on the altar of profit, nor in the squalid mediocrity of "small is beautiful", which is also impossible. Only by smashing the fetters of property, the market and money can human beings put themselves on the road to a really better world and liberate the "living planet" from the incubus of ecological collapse.

Notes

1 On these questions, see, for example, *Prometeo* 7, 2003.

2 See GS, "Dalla Resistenza a Marcos. Miti vecchi e nuovi contro il mutamento" ["From the Resistance to Marcos. Myths old and new against change."], *Battaglia Comunista*, no. 11, 2003.

3 The so-called G21 comprises, amongst others, Brazil, South Africa, India and China.

4 *Il Manifesto*, 16th September 2003.

5 The Cobas are a base organisation in Italy.

6 See P. Bernocchi's declaration at 222.cobas-scuola.org.

7 L. Castellina, "Il WTO a Cancun: un'oligarchia in crisi?" ["The WTO in Cancun: an oligarchy in crisis?"], in *Revista del Manifesto*, no. 42, September 2003, p55.

8 See *Il Manifesto* of 16th September 2003 and <http://unimondo.oneworld.net/article/view/675191/1/>.

9 M. Chossudovsky, *Globalizzazione della povertà e Nuovo ordine mondiale* [Globalisation of poverty and the new world order], Turin, Edizioni Gruppo Abele, 2003, p22.

10 M. Ricci, "Le dodici 'sorelle' che decidono il futuro del Terzo Mondo" ("The twelve 'sisters' who decided the future of the Third World"), *La Repubblica*, 23rd August 2002.

11 M. Dinucci, "Le conseguenze sociali del crollo del prezzo del caffè" ("The social consequences of the collapse in the coffee price"), April 2002, at www.zanichelli.it/scuola/geografia/dinucci.htm.

12 M. Chossudovsky, *op. cit.*, p132; to cite a few more sources: P. de Muro, "La centralità dell'intervento pubblico" ("The centrality of public intervention"), *Rivoluzioni, Liberazione's* monthly, of June 2002; M. Dinucci, "Il problema alimentare" ("The food problem"), in *Il sistema*

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Pensions**

globale 2002, (*The global system 2002*), Bologna, Zanichelli, pp104-7; M. D'Eramo, "Il medico indiano. Il surplus va tutto all'estero, 300 milioni di persone sono denutrite" ("The Indian doctor. The surplus all goes abroad, 300 millions are malnourished"), *Il Manifesto*, 27th February 2001.

13 M Davis, "Le carestie coloniali, genocidio dimenticato" ("The colonial famines, a forgotten genocide"), *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 2003. But, before this, see the pages of the first volume of Marx's *Capital* on the famines in Ireland and in India, or the no less passionate and acerbic pages of Rosa Luxemburg in *The Accumulation of Capital*.

14 A. Bordiga, *Mai il merce sfamerà l'uomo* (*The market will never free humanity from hunger*), Milan, Iskra, 1979, p218.

15 "Today, Indian production is superior to what the country can absorb at the present levels of purchasing power. We do not produce enough for our demand for food, but we produce more than what the people of this country can allow themselves to buy", cited in M. D'Eramo; also see M. Chossudovsky, *op. cit.*, the chapters

devoted to Ethiopia, Somalia, Vietnam and Ruanda.

16 M. Chossudovsky, *op. cit.*, p179.

17 M. Chossudovsky, *op. cit.*, p168-9.

18 C. Braekman, "In Sudafrica, tra i contadini dimenticati" ("In South Africa, among the forgotten peasants"), *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 2003.

19 S. Morandi, "Chi mangia e chi no" ("Who eats and who doesn't"), *Rivoluzioni*, *op. cit.*; M. Dinucci, *op. cit.*, p106.

20 Mercosur is a trade association involving Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

21 M. Dinucci, *op. cit.*, p72.

22 M. Dinucci, *op. cit.*, p71.

23 According to M. Correggia in his interview with p. Rosset, *Il Manifesto* 23rd June 2002, there are only 900 000 American "farmers"; "in France peasants represent only 2% of the population", J. Bové and F. Dufour, *The World is not for Sale: Farmers against Junk Food*, p204 of the Italian version of the expanded second edition.

24 A quintal is 100kg.

25 S Amin, "Il WTO a Cancun: Una proposta alternativa" ("The WTO at Cancun: an alternative proposal"), *Rivista del manifesto*, no. 42, September 2003, p56.

26 *Ibid.*

27 See the cited works of Amin, and Bové and Dufour; J.P. Stedile, leader of the *Sem Terra* in Brazil, in the cited *Rivoluzioni*; "Sovranità Alimentare dei Popoli: facciamola funzionare!" ("People's Food sovereignty: make it work!"), Foro Contadino — Altragricoltura (Peasant Forum — Alternative agriculture), at <http://altragricoltura.org/foro-contadino/viacamp-sovralimentare.htm>.

28 "without doubt the principal contradiction is not between poor peasants and rich peasants who can give work to agricultural hands, but between all the peasants of Larzac and the army, that is, the state", Bové and Dufour, *op. cit.*, p46. They refer to the struggle against

the extension of a military base in the Larzac region, in which, among others, Bové participated.

29 It is not for nothing that the peasants have always been the electoral reserve of the conservative parties, such as Christian Democracy in Italy.

30 J. Berthelot, "L'impatto della riforma della PAC in seno all'Unione Europea e sui paesi in via di sviluppo" ("The impact of the CAP reform within the European Union and on the developing countries"), 17th July 2003, at www.altragricoltura.org.

31 M. Correggia, "Quando il pollo arriva dal Brasile" ("When the hen arrives from Brazil"), *Il manifesto*, 22nd June 2002; Bové and Dufour, *op. cit.*, pp112-3.

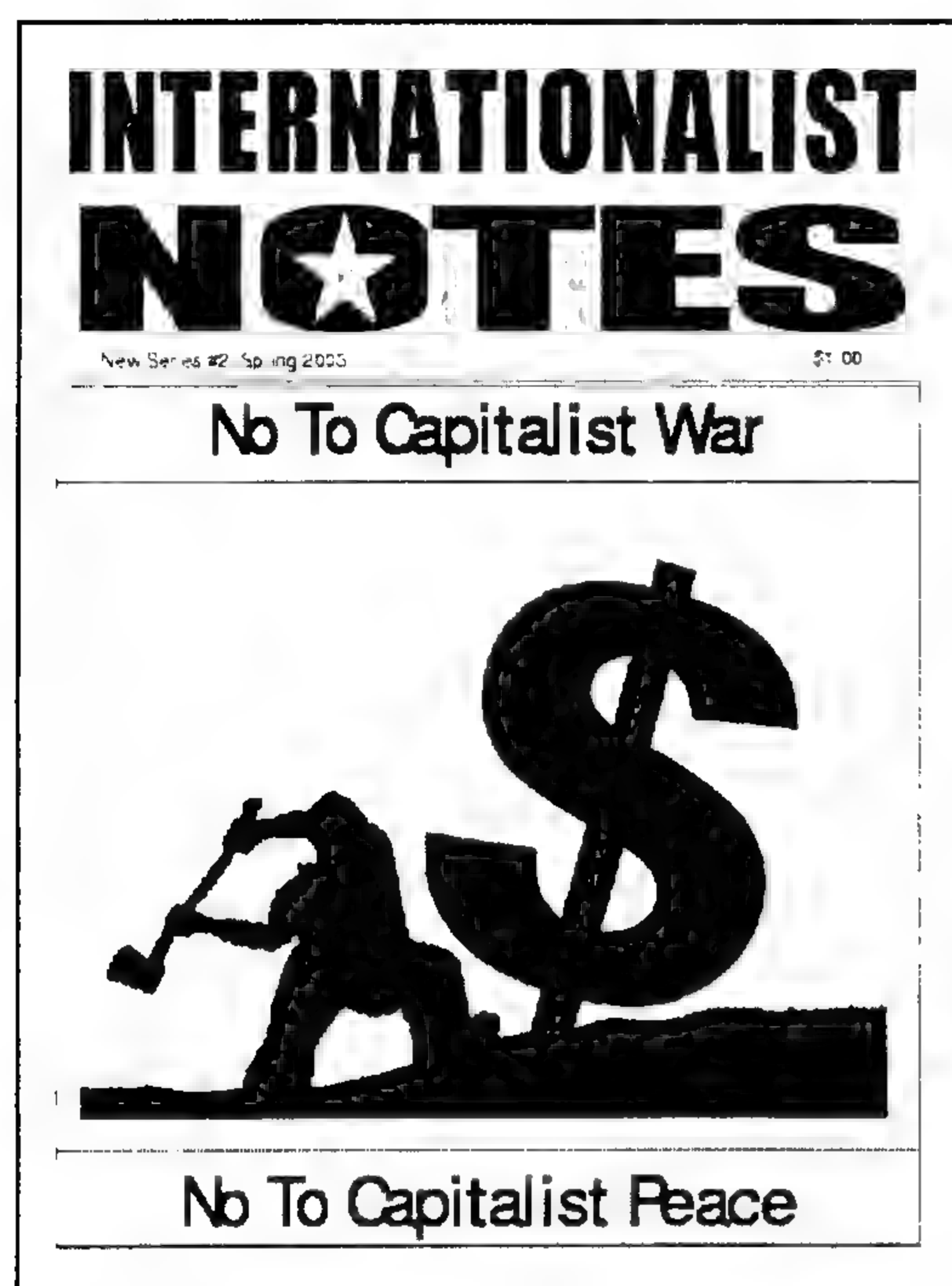
32 Bové and Dufour, *op. cit.*, pp123-4.

33 Bové and Dufour, *op. cit.*, but the whole book is shot through with this "philosophy"; also see Foro Contadino, *op. cit.*

34 M. Dinucci, "Gli organismi geneticamente modificati" ("Genetically modified organisms"), update to "Il sistema globale 2002" ("The global system 2002"), at <http://zanichelli.it/scuola/geografica/dinucci/genetica.htm> and M. D'Eramo, "Il continente da modificare" ("The continent to modify"), *Il manifesto*, 27th August 2002.

35 Bové and Dufour, *op. cit.*, pp129-30.

36 Lenin, *The Agrarian Question and the "Critics of Marx"*.



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Parmalat: Many Actors – Same Comedy of Errors

Tricks and financial scandals are the rule in modern capitalism

After Enron, after Argentina and after Cirio¹, it's now the turn of Parmalat, one of the biggest industrial and financial groups in the world. If we go beyond the immediate details of this case, what emerges is a widespread tale of fraud carried out with the complicity and connivance of the world of high finance. The same story comes out every time: businessmen and administrators who falsify a company's balance sheet, controlling bodies which don't realise what is going on and don't check anything, accounting firms and licensing regulators which don't issue licences except to cover up, certify and give legality to the false accounts. On top of this we have governments which, instead of punishing this behaviour, encourage it with legislation which reduces the punishments for offences committed in connection with financial swindles.

The tendency to financialisation

These frauds are so dramatic, the size of the debts undertaken by the companies at the centre of the scandals are of such size and frequency, that we have to ask if we are dealing with a blip in the world of high finance or whether we are looking at something deeper within the structure of the system, the outcome of a tendency in a system which has gone down the road towards the progressive financialisation of the economic activities of any company. As far as we are concerned we are dealing with the second hypothesis for the undeniable reason that capitalism is now going through a profound crisis from which it has not been able to escape.

The goods manufactured in the industrial activities of companies are now less important contributors to the

income of enterprises which are increasingly leaning towards speculative financial activity as the most significant component of their overall balance sheets. Putting it bluntly, enterprises survive less on their productive activity based on the direct exploitation of labour which creates real wealth, by increasingly earning income through financial means which are in contrast a net drain on the real wealth created by the production of goods. Such a situation is symptomatic of the serious illness through which capitalism is running and thus encourages these dangerous financial machinations which lead, increasingly frequently, to tricks on the balance sheet seeking to hide the colossal debts undertaken by people who have nothing in common with the entrepreneur typical of the early days of capitalism. Why do we speak of a crisis in the system and not of a mere traffic accident? This is because it is not just the frequency with which these scandals of indebted firms are emerging, and which transform themselves into insolvencies of a size never seen before, but because bourgeois economic theory itself is based on debt (from Keynes onwards) as a possible way of developing the economy. Today the results are staggering. Enterprises, states, the entire world economy are all run on debt, on a debt that cannot be honoured given its size and its irresistible tendency to grow. In this context, the creation of real value created by labour power, of surplus value and the production of real commodities has been replaced by an economy based on paper, i.e. of values declared but not produced, of values guaranteed only by the godlike power of the state or of the high-sounding names of the world of high finance, all frauds and symptoms demonstrating the deep-seated evil which grips capitalism. Taken together the economic and financial mechanisms have a mirror image in the social sphere: within these scandals we

can find so many "authoritative" people wheeling and dealing to whom we can give no other title but "rentier" or speculator. These parasites are the figures which dominate society, forcing on to it, in defence of their privileges, the greatest sacrifices.

One law for the rich ...

This phenomenon emerges with still greater clarity in the Parmalat Affair. The entrepreneurs and the managers involved were the architects of a colossal fraud based on the falsifications of balance sheets and on reckless international financial operations. Whilst this brought in huge sums of money through the issue of bonds, they realised the fruits of their efforts by transferring the profits to a so-called fiscal paradise², held in a tangled web of finance companies. The whole thing was based on the confidence in the firm by the markets which allowed it, notwithstanding its frightening indebtedness, to repeatedly issue new capital loan bonds: they thought the accounting firm responsible was in control but it never once made adequate checks which would have unmasked the fraud. We are not talking here of a little nest egg but of a hidden debt of €14bn. (£9.4bn)

And the banks? Those very same banks who, when a proletarian asks for a loan to buy a home to live in, scrutinise the total family income with x rays before they are satisfied enough to grant a mortgage? They don't recognise that there are any limits when it comes to transactions in the shares of firms. According to the bourgeois press the falsification of accounts which has come to light goes back to 1990. Thirteen years of wrongdoing going on under the noses of the control bodies which, until a few months ago, guaranteed both the issue of bonds and the accounting firm, accountants with a very high international reputation, which gave their stamp of approval to Parmalat's finances.

What do the managers of these firms, who have been up to their elbows in this fraud, risk? An authoritative Italian daily explains that these crooks, after the recent laws on company rights were passed, risk, at the most, a fine of €10,000 for having hidden the hole in the accounts from the auditors. Furthermore, according to the new rules which aim to decriminalise the offence of false accounting they can be condemned to a prison sentence, no greater however than one year (previously it was five years) but only following a private prosecution! In the USA [so we can compare how the bourgeoisie in other countries goes on] after the Enron scandal a law was passed which demanded up to twenty years in prison for the very same offence. It is worth remembering that Italian law now allows a "tolerance threshold" of 5%, linked to the overall profit made, within which prosecution of the offence is not carried out. Besides false information the judge has to take into account that those

associated must have had the "intention of deceiving associates or the public" and the aim of obtaining "an unfair profit". This is manna to any defence lawyer who takes pleasure in splitting hairs and finding exceptions to the case of the public authorities who have to show an intention to commit a crime. In practice we are talking about a tangle of rules which can only lead to the impunity of the criminals!

But what is more odious is that these same authorities and political types who have taken so much trouble to ensure the immunity of the capitalist tricksters and exploiters are also the ones who, at the moment, have raised accusations of criminality against the tramworkers, who they call the kings of public disruption with their strikes. In reality what has happened? The tramworkers have asked that a wage agreement made two years ago, and signed by, but not kept to, by the management of their firm, should be respected. This agreement gave them

a few euros in their pay packet but they still haven't received them and they have already lost them due to the rapid increase in the cost of living!

*From Battaglia Comunista 1
[January 2004]*

Notes

- 1 Another Italian food giant, best known for tomato products.
- 2 In this, as in so many other cases, the Cayman Islands.

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22: Class Consciousness, Political Organisations (2); Genoa, Real Face of the Capitalist State; Italian Strikes; Unemployment; Argentina Crisis; Racism in Britain; Autism; Ireland; Son of Star Wars; Cap'lism's 3rd Sector
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29: Iraq; War and Occupation; Galloway and Luxemburg; ME Road Map; 9/11; Green Light for State Terror; Firefighters; Pensions; Consciousness (9) — Bordiga; Class Composition

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University Top-up Fees: Labour Shows its Class

Well, they did it. Despite all the talk of Labour rebellions, of the late night meetings of Labour Whips with recalcitrant MPs, we had a "nailbiting finish" which saw the Government introduce student top-up fees by a mere 5 votes. The Government normally enjoys a Commons majority of 161 votes. In the end only 71 Labour MPs voted against top-up fees whilst a further 19 abstained. However it all demonstrated the wonders of the workings of our great democratic system. Or did it? As over the war in Iraq most of the population were against it, 70% of all age groups of the population are opposed to the introduction of top-up fees. Perhaps just as significant, though, was the promise in Labour's Manifesto to the electorate in 2001 which categorically stated that:

We will not introduce top-up fees and have legislated to prevent them.

Conscious perhaps that they had got away with an earlier broken promise in the 1997 Manifesto that they would not scrap the student maintenance grant, nor introduce tuition fees, they presumably felt safe in making yet another commitment they would not keep. In fact the introduction of loans under the previous Tory regime spelt the end of the whole principle of free higher education in England and Wales. Labour have merely carried on where the Tories left off. In short we have another example of how there is no such thing as "democratic choice". If the ruling class don't want to adopt a certain course even against overwhelming public opinion they won't. This will be touted as "showing leadership" (oddly enough caving in to populist opinion as spouted by the Sun

or the Daily Mail on asylum seekers doesn't merit the same kind of principled stand!).

The Daily Mail's favourite Labour politician (because he does whatever they say) is David Blunkett. Now the most reactionary Home Secretary since Michael Howard (or is it Jack Straw?), he was Education Minister in the first Blair Government. Who better to invent a whole new spurious set of arguments to claim that he stood for an egalitarian principle. He argued then that cleaners should not pay for

get a loan to survive through a university degree course but also having to pay fees for the same education which Mr Blunkett had got for free. The very people who will be discouraged from going to university will be the sons and daughters of the low paid.

The crisis of education

The crisis of the university sector arises from several sources. In the first place there has been a determined attempt to

broaden access to university since the 1980's. However, during that period, the actual funding for universities from the state has fallen by 37% per student. If the Labour Government is to keep on target to achieve 50% plus going to university, it has to find the cash to pay for it. This is extremely difficult when tax revenues in the current crisis have fallen by £5 billions. To have such a high ex-

penditure item on any budget is going to mean more taxes. The University Funding Bill which passed its first reading in the House of Commons at the start of February introduced a variable fee of £3000. However this is really only the thin end of a fairly hefty wedge. Eventually the ceiling of £3000 will be removed (it is supposedly frozen until 2011) and then a free-for-all between universities will begin. In this competition for funding between universities the Oxbridge colleges with their already large endowments and the so called elite universities of the "Russell Group" (such as Imperial College whose Vice-Chancellor has already suggested fees of £15,000) will



Campaigning against top-up fees on their own are not enough

students (out of taxation) to get an education which would eventually get them a much higher paid job. This apparent and hypocritical defence of the low paid was obviously an argument which the spin doctors in Whitehall thought a winner. At the end of 2002, Margaret Hodge, the then Higher Education Minister, gave the first indications that Labour were about to break another promise when she first talked of the introduction of top-up fees. She asked "should the dustman subsidise the doctor?". Having put away our handkerchiefs at the apparent injustice done to cleaners and dustmen, we might ask how the children of those cleaners and dustmen would now feel at the prospect of not only having to

be able to develop further what is already arguably a two-or-even-three-tier system of university education. The children of the rich would pay to get a classier degree and the graduates from these universities would get higher paid jobs. In a sense this is only an extension of what already happens. One of the not-so-subtle claims that Oxbridge colleges make to attract the brightest comprehensive school pupils is to inform them that the average starting salary of an Oxbridge graduate will be £10,000 a year higher than those from an "ordinary university". The same will now apply in greater numbers to those who have studied on the more prestigious courses. In a stroke it wipes out the value of "higher education for all" and indeed graduate unemployment or underemployment will increase. Already there are many graduates out there who labour in call centres or have casual part-time work. The lie that the extra debt (and at least £10,000 has been the norm for years, even for those who have worked every hour they can) will be of no importance has already ensured that some graduates cannot afford to go for higher paid earnings. The other lie that only the rich will have to pay is also exposed by the fact that a combined parental income of £23,000 (gross) will be all that is needed to qualify a student to pay in full. This is not therefore an attack on the middle class (who it is true have been the main beneficiaries of the welfare state since its inception) but the working class. Students of working class origin only account for 25.8% of the current student population despite years of attempts to swell their numbers. The same students also have the highest dropout rates (up to a third in some London colleges). As it stands universities like Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, Durham, as well as Imperial College and University College in London have never achieved the "benchmarks" set by the Higher Education Funding Council in terms of increasing the number of students from state schools. The thought of taking on such debt which they will have to repay at something like 9% of their income a year would mean that they were taxed more heavily than the super-rich. It is too much for many to even contemplate and even fewer universities will meet their "benchmarks".

Top-up fees will not even solve the university funding crisis. As these fees are capped until 2011 the universities

will still face a shortfall of £1.6 billions by 2010 if current planned expansion goes ahead, according to research carried out by the Higher Education Policy Institute. The claim that Blair made when in opposition was that he did not want a low skill, low wage labour force in Britain. What he will in fact create (and is already creating) is a high skill, low wage labour force who will be encumbered with high taxes from the moment they start earning.

The other capitalist parties have no solutions either. The Liberal Democrats proposals according to the same research will leave an even bigger shortfall in university funding and the Tory solution to economic viability is simply to deny half a million young people the chance to go to university at all. The fact of the matter is that the capitalist state is approaching bankruptcy in every sense of the word. It is bankrupt of ideas, bankrupt of principles and has no longer got the cash to offer the right of education for all which it boasted back in the post-war boom.

Capitalism and education

Education is not something that stands outside of society. In a class society the system operates according to the needs of that society. These needs change over time. Once it was considered dangerous to educate the working class above their station (which why was the working class had to fight for it). However when mass education was conceded it was, like the vote itself, on the terms of the modern capitalist state. The motive was state security not philanthropy. Prussian defeat of France in 1870 was accredited to the "Prussian schoolmaster" who had provided a more literate and flexible type of soldier. Not surprisingly the Forster Education Act which brought in universal elementary schooling in England and Wales dates from the same year. Today we have gone the other way. The school leaving age has been hiked up to 16 but in reality it is becoming 18 since there are virtually no jobs for the 16-18 group to do. Hence the expansion of Higher Education to pretend that it is possible to do a degree in almost anything. Universities are cutting down on courses like sociology and philosophy (dangerous thinking might occur) and increasing the offerings of vocational and practical subjects (tour-

ism etc.). Pieces of paper are seen as the key to personal success but increasingly that "success" is measured in ever lower expectations. The class of degree you get is measured not in terms of academic attainment but in terms of the class of the university you went to. If you went to the top universities doing a top subject then you will be at the top of the social tree. For the others there are a series of jobs which pay less than lorry driving. It is perhaps dangerous to educate people to a high level but schooling them to a high level is a different thing entirely. If you only have to do what they tell you to get your bit of paper you have acquired the subservient habits required for fitting into a capitalist life completely dominated by media transmitted patterns of consumption. Currently we are becoming in the words of Ivan Illich "all schooled up". You get a piece of paper to say you can understand a course but not necessarily a discipline. Instead you understand the need for discipline in work and you accept poor pay, a mountain of debt and a dreary pointless job as part of the natural order of things. In short capitalism's education system is producing exactly the kind of graduates it needs.

Which means that the way to fight back is not just to fight this or that policy of the capitalist state. Yes the student fees issue should be the basis for discussion amongst all students, Yes the proposed introduction of top up fees is a real attack on living standards, both now and in the future and should be fought as such by every means available. However the issue should not be seen in isolation. The aim of the state, as the state of the capitalist class, is to create a capable workforce in which the general capacity to labour is provided at the cheapest cost. The whole aim of the current policy is to create a workforce which will be flexible in its ability to labour but docile in its capacity to think. Our resistance has to be based on this fact.

AD

RESPECT Unity Coalition — More Bourgeois Politics

In January the RESPECT unity coalition was launched. This ridiculous name was chosen because the letters stand for a number of issues now fashionable amongst the capitalist left, namely, Respect for other people's views particularly; their religion, Equality, Socialism, Peace, Environmentalism, Community and Trade Unionism. The odd inclusion in this list is "Socialism", but, as we soon discover that this is equated with state capitalism, these elements form a consistent whole.

The aim behind this new coalition is to capture some of the dissent which was mobilised in the anti-war campaign and channel it into the politics of capitalism's left wing. The first act of the coalition will apparently be the fielding candidates in the next council and European elections. The leading political force behind this new coalition appears to be the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) who are assisted by several lesser Trotskyist formations. The partial collapse of their previous electoral alliance, the "Socialist

Alliance" has prompted them to construct an even broader alliance from which they hope to recruit. The expulsion of George Galloway from the Labour Party gave them a well-known figure to place in the leadership and the recruitment of the environmentalist George Monbiot and the Moslem anti-war campaigner Salma Yaqoob is supposed to bring in the environmentalists and the Moslems.

The bourgeois nature of the coalition's aspirations is betrayed in the pronouncements of its leading lights. Galloway, for example, in his inaugural speech at the coalition's foundation speaks for the need for politicisation of the anti-war movement. He says,

The first level requires steps ... to ... complete an unfinished radical democratic revolution. This level will unite, Moslems, Christians, Jews ... in one movement of democratic liberation. ... The second tier is the battle for ideas...!

Galloway appears to think that the bourgeois democratic revolution has not been completed in Britain. Britain is, of course, the country where the bourgeois class has held power longest, since 1688 in fact, and the vestiges of the feudal economy were eliminated by the end of the 18th century. And, as every 'A' Level student of British Constitution, feudal power

GALLOWAY



IS INNOCENT

... of anything which might help the proletariat.

went the same way. Apart from the astonishing ignorance which appears to be behind his statement, what it does show us is that for Galloway the coalition is bourgeois democratic and nothing more. The parliamentary ambitions of the new coalition are reinforced by George Monbiot who, writing in *The Guardian*, says,

We must ... revitalise parliamentary politics... Concentrate on capturing and taming the beast [i.e., parliament — CWO]

The SWP adds the ingredient of state capitalism, which it equates with socialism. Writing for the SWP, Paul Foot tells us,

An alternative political leadership based on the mass movement is critical. The forces brought together by the anti-war movement have the capacity to do this ... The principles should be public ownership and comprehensive education.

The coalition therefore plans to enter the bourgeois parliamentary circus to try and revitalise it in order to create the paradise of state capitalism, saved environment and peace. The coalition resembles a witch's cauldron in which a number of reformist issues are thrown

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**Editorial : l'Argentine
Elections et parlementarisme
Algérie, Kabylie été 2001
Marxisme et conscience de
classe
De quelques
considérations autour de
l'intervention en Afghanistan**

**N°3 février 2002
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to stew. Some of the organisers hope that electoral success will come out of this pot, others hope it will provide a recruiting ground for their organisations. In any event what is being created is a populist movement for reform of capitalism.

Capitalism cannot be reformed

The history of capitalism since the First World War had proved the futility of all attempts to reform it. Those reforms which have occurred have been dictated by the needs of capitalism itself and not those of the working class. Any benefits which have come to the working class have been incidental and have also proved ephemeral. What capitalism gave with one hand it took away with the other. The reform of capitalism is, in fact, a complete illusion kept alive by the political forces of capital's left wing. One particular proposal of the coalition, that of using parliament, deserves particular mention. It betrays a complete failure to comprehend that parliament and bourgeois democracy are simply tools for administering the dictatorship of the capitalist class over society while providing the illusion that the exploited have some say in what

happens. (See "Hutton enquiry and the BBC" in this issue.) As long as the fundamental inequalities exist in society, that is to say as long as class society exists, democracy cannot exist. Attempts to win reforms through parliament are, therefore, doomed before they are even started.

Use of capitalism's left wing

The anti-war movement performed a valuable task for capitalism. It brought together all who were disgusted with the war and were starting to ask questions about the society which brought it about, and led them back into the democratic swamp. It did this despite the fact that the farce of bourgeois democracy was illustrated on the national and international levels by the war. On the national level, Blair launched the war despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the population was against it, and on the international level he did the same against the wishes of the UN. To lead these people back into bourgeois electoral politics by urging them to call for a change in Labour's leadership, democratisation of the party and all the rest of it, was a means of dissipating their anger and of destroying their

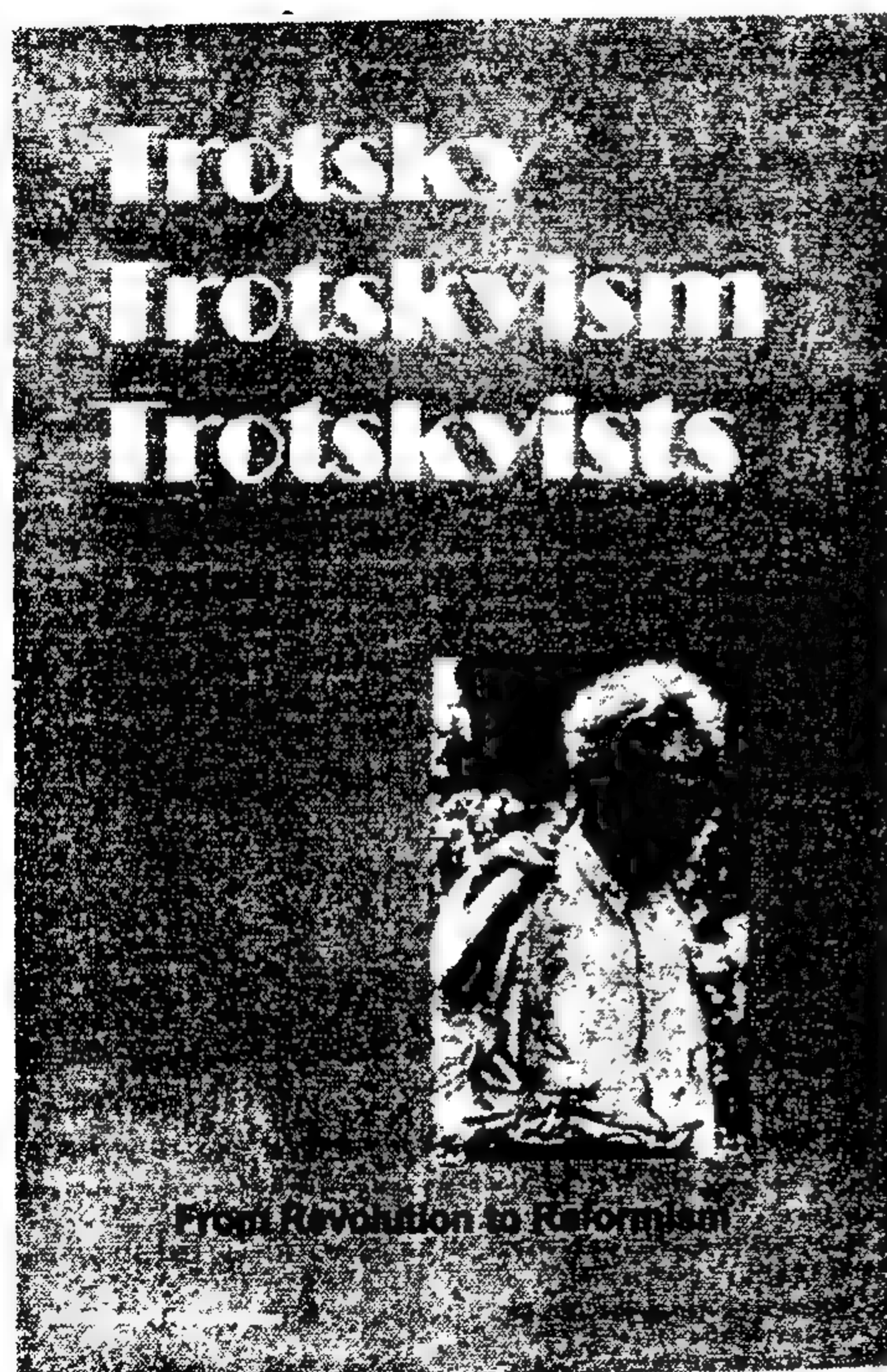
less quest for reforms.

Revolution and revolutionary organisation needed.

All of the issues which the coalition wants to change have as their root cause the capitalist system of production and most of them can only be addressed once the capitalist system is replaced. The only organisations which can serve the interests of the working class on a permanent basis are revolutionary ones. Capitalism needs to be replaced and the only way this can be done is to start to organise for this. The communist programme needs to be revived and a revolutionary party needs to be built to fight for its acceptance in the working class. Those who are today disillusioned with capitalism and disgusted by the crimes and savagery it is unleashing worldwide need to come towards revolutionary politics. They need to be shown revolutionary perspectives for the future. This is the only way forward. Organisations such as this new coalition are preventing this from happening.

Charlie

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nascent criticism of the society which could do such things. It was the best possible way of demoralising them. Needless to say, all attempts to remove Blair and reform the Labour Party prove a hopeless failure. This new coalition performs the same role for capitalism. It is trying to collect all the remaining energy of the anti-war movement and lead it into the electoral reformist swamp. The SWP and their hangers-on are the pied pipers of capital's left wing. They will lead whatever strength remains in the movement to utter demoralisation and dissipate its energies in the hope-

Notes

- 1 Speech quoted by Y Ridley under www.world-crisis.com
- 2 See *The Guardian* 18/11/03
- 3 See *Socialist Review* December 2003

Hutton Report and the BBC —

Splits in the Ruling Class

The uproar which greeted the publication of the Hutton report is further indication of the depth of the division which exists in the ruling class. Much of the press could hardly believe the report and called it a whitewash. The BBC was stunned. The whole issue of the Iraq war has split the bourgeois class into two broad groups, creating something of a crisis amongst our rulers. However, since these groups do not conform to the existing political parties, but rather cut across them, this has not resulted in a serious political crisis for the Blair cabal. Even so, the fundamental question of whether the Iraq war was in the best interests of British imperialism, or whether it was against these interests, will not go away.

Lies for war

It is well known that the bourgeoisie's reasons for going to war are always disguised in a tissue of lies which are generally only exposed decades later, when the events are distant memories. For example the great lies concealing the imperialist nature of both the First and Second World Wars are now acknowledged, even by bourgeois historians. Although these wars were supposed to be fought to oppose German militarism, in the case of the First World War, and to rescue civilisation from Fascism, in the case of the Second, in reality they were fought to make the world safe for British capital. It is, however, unusual for these lies to be exposed so soon after the event. This has occurred because a significant section of the ruling class think that Blair has betrayed the interests of British imperialism and are prepared to see his excuses for war investigated. In addition, we have been given a glimpse of the cynicism of the process whereby the great fabrications are concocted and fed to the media to mould public opinion. It has now been revealed, for example, that the truth about Saddam's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) was changed into its direct opposite to support the case for war. Evidence given to the Hutton enquiry revealed how a completely false dossier was

cooked up against much of the evidence provided by the spies. In redrafting and grooming the document, possibilities were changed to certainties, weapons which were initially defensive became offensive and statements saying Iraq was not a danger to Britain were deleted. The suggestion from the Intelligence services that the war would increase the risk of global terrorism rather than reduce it was, of course, not mentioned. This entire deception was designed to convince a sceptical public to back the Bush/Blair war. It is worth noting that had the Blair faction not wanted to go to war a more convincing document, arguing precisely the opposite of the September dossier, could have been concocted from the intelligence.

Now that the truth is partly out of the bag, what we are witnessing is a rearguard action by the Blair faction to cover its tracks and to shuffle off the blame and stick it to others. The hypocrisy with which this political farce is being acted out is extraordinary. At the same time as the US chief weapons inspector was pronouncing the whole claim of existence of WMD in Iraq to be untrue, Hutton was totally exonerating Blair and his henchmen of fabricating the September dossier, which as we all know had as its central tenet the claim that Iraq had WMD. At the same time as the BBC was being savaged for saying the dossier was a wild exaggeration, another government weapons inspector, Brian Jones, ex-Defence Intelligence Service chief, revealed that he was so unhappy with the dossier that he filed a memo dissociating his staff from parts of it. When the conclusions of the Hutton report were published they were so contrary to the truth, which was even being admitted by the Bush junta, that Blair was forced to announce another enquiry. The new one is going to investigate how he was misinformed. No doubt this new enquiry, the Butler enquiry, which we are told is to meet in secret, will prove that Blair was deceived by the spies but that he, of course, did the right thing anyway. Only

the most naïve would believe that an innocent Blair was deceived by his spies. The truth of the matter is that Blair knew exactly what the state of Saddam's WMD was, just as the UN inspectors knew, and far from being deceived by the spies it was the other way round. The spies were used to produce the required propaganda. As we have argued before, see RP 29, the invasion had nothing whatsoever to do with WMD. The war was an imperialist one to secure control of Iraq's oil and the supplies of oil of the Middle East.

BBC Mouthpiece of British Imperialism

The immediate loser in the fallout from Hutton's report was the BBC. The report castigated the BBC without reservation and its chairman and director were forced to resign together with the journalist who uncovered the falsification of the dossier. As with Hutton's other conclusions this was greeted with howls of protest and praise for the BBC as the voice of impartiality, fair reporting, etc. Workers at the corporation even came out in protest in support of their sacked managers!

It needs to be pointed out again that the whole dispute between the BBC and the government is simply a dispute between factions of the ruling class. The issue is whether the Blair faction has acted in the best interests of British imperialism or not. As we pointed out in RP 30¹, there is a significant faction of the British ruling class who think their interests would be better served by an alliance with the Franco-German axis rather than as junior partners of US imperialism. The BBC through its criticism of the war found itself on the opposite side of the dispute to its masters in Whitehall. This does not, of course, mean the BBC is not the mouthpiece of British imperialism. It is exactly that, even if it is one of the more sophisticated propaganda machines in the world. Throughout the Cold War it broadcast about the wonders of free market capitalism to the Russian bloc. That this was one of its

fundamental purposes as is shown by its axing of the German service and cutting back on the Russian ones shortly after the fall of the Berlin wall. The BBC, the Voice of America and Radio Moscow all performed the same role. The BBC is similarly the voice of the British bourgeois class. The voices and politics of the working class are never heard unless to be distorted and ridiculed. When class conflict occurs the BBC knows exactly how to undermine and weaken the position of the working class. We only need to recall the BBC's coverage of the '84-'85 miners strike, particularly the encouragement given to the Nottinghamshire miners to break the strike, to understand how this is done.

As Marx writes in *The German Ideology*,

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.

The BBC is part of the machinery which ensures that the bourgeoisie's ideas become the generally accepted ideas in our society. Within the whole

range of institutions which perform this role, from Universities and schools, to newspapers, television and radio, the BBC's place is an essential one. Its propaganda is more subtle and intellectual than that of the *The Sun* but its role is essentially the same. We point to only two areas where it performs this

the fact that today's democracy is a form of class rule where the working class are fooled into thinking they have a say in what goes on. The BBC is, of course, itself one of the organs which carry out this deception.

When BBC workers came out in support of their managers they were, in effect, taking one side in a dispute amongst the bourgeoisie. That they thought they should do this was an indication that the propaganda spouted by BBC has affected its own workers. Instead of supporting their bosses, workers need to expose the systematic lying which the organisation carries out. They need to expose its role in indoctrinating the working class to ensure the survival of the rotten system under which we live.

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Note

See RP 30 "Hutton enquiry shows widening splits in the British Ruling class."

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Karl Marx

The CWO's Basic Positions

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx): Communism.
2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the

forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.

3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as

yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve — the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

Internationalist Communist

Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

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